The New Criterion

Special anniversary issue

September 1996

Volume 15, Number 1

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Published monthly except July and August by The Foundation for Cultural Review, Inc., 850 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY 10019, a nonprofit public foundation as described in Section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue code, which solicits and accepts contributions from a wide range of sources, including public and private foundations, corporations, and the general public. ISSN 0734-0222. September 1996, Volume 15, Number 1. Subscriptions: $36 for one year, $65 for two. Outside the United States, add $7 per year. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Subscribers: send all remittances, changes of address, and subscription inquiries to The New Criterion, P.O. Box 3000, Denville, NJ 07834. For subscription problems call (800) 783-4903. Copyright © 1996 by The Foundation for Cultural Review, Inc. Newsstand distribution by Eastern News Distributors, Inc., One Media Way, 12406 Rt. 250, Milan, OH 44846. (800) 221-3148. Available in microfilm from University Microfilms, 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. All correspondence should be addressed to The New Criterion, 850 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY 10019. (212) 247-6980.

Advertising: Galleries & fine arts: Fred Stern, 44 Paulin Boulevard, Leonia, NJ 07605. (201) 947-2674.
Publishers & others: Richard A. Vaughan, 129 Phelps Avenue, Rockford, IL 61108. (815) 398-8569.

The New Criterion is designed by Alvin and James Eisenman.

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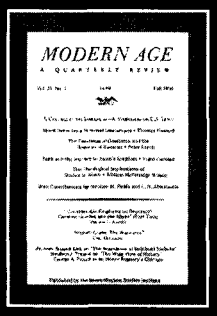

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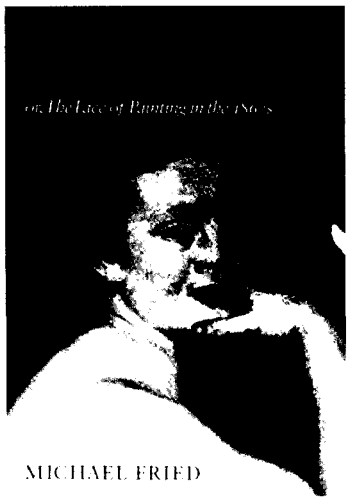

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Notes & Comments: September 1996

"Judgment is forced upon us by experience."

This month *The New Criterion* commences its fifteenth year of publication. This is in itself something of a feat for a monthly review of art and culture that is avowedly conservative in its political views and unabashedly modernist in its outlook on the arts. For ours has necessarily been a voice of embattled dissent in a period that has seen American cultural life held hostage to the imperatives of a Left-liberal ideology in politics and an ugly "postmodernist" assault on the arts. To dissent from the baleful influence of the cultural Left on the life of art and culture in our society has indeed been one of the primary purposes of *The New Criterion* from the outset, and it remains one of our primary functions today, when that influence continues to prosper in the academy, in the media, and in so many of the other institutions that shape our values and determine our standards.

It has not been our only function, however. Of even greater urgency, in our view, has been our effort to restore to American cultural life a standard of criticism and a respect for tradition that are essential to the arts if they are to survive as an intellectually autonomous enterprise and not be permanently condemned to ideological servitude. Important as it has been for us to resist the Left's subversion of disinterested criticism and its demonization of tradition, we have taken it to be a fundamental purpose of our mission to advance the kind of criticism that upholds aesthetic standards and illuminates the crucial role which an enlightened understanding of tradition plays in the formulation of such standards.

Hence the priority that *The New Criterion* has given to what, for want of a better name, we are unembarrassed to call the traditional practice of criticism—meaning, among much else, criticism that is concerned to make distinctions of quality and is sufficiently informed to do so with authority; criticism that is as judicious in lavishing praise as it is rigorous in applying censure; criticism that is loyal, above all, to the experience of the art that is its principal object of interest and resistant to the temptation to sacrifice that experience in the pursuit of deconstructive scenarios and political partisanship—even, it must be said, when we happen to be in sympathy with the politics in question.

In practice, moreover, we have always aspired to publish criticism that is a pleasure to read, criticism that is capable of engaging difficult and challenging ideas without resorting to academic jargon or hermetic

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theory, criticism that is itself a literary accomplishment of some distinction. We reject the notion, now so widely accepted in the academy, that criticism is most serious when it is most hermetic, most profound when it is least accessible, most deserving of our support when it is most esoteric and obscurantist. This prejudice in favor of obscurantism does not account for the greatest criticism of the past, and it doesn't account for what is valuable in criticism today. Indeed, the perverse celebration of obscurantism is itself a repudiation of our finest critical traditions, and adherence to it has done great damage to the enterprise of criticism.

"Judgment is forced upon us by experience," as Samuel Johnson observed in his life of Pope. "He that reads many books must compare one opinion or one style with another, and when he compares, must necessarily distinguish, reject, and prefer." In literary criticism, as in the criticism of the other artistic and humanistic disciplines, this remains the fundamental *donnée* of the critical vocation. To deny it is to deny the experience of art itself, and make of it a purely instrumental—which is to say, purely political—enterprise. It was our conviction in launching *The New Criterion* that there was a compelling need for criticism of this traditional persuasion, and it has been our good fortune to have found so many devoted readers—and so many gifted writers—eager to support us in that belief. It is therefore to our readers and our writers that we dedicate this special issue as we commence our fifteenth year of publication.

Poetry & tradition

Robert Frost once famously remarked that he regarded the practice of free verse as akin to playing tennis with the net down. *The New Criterion* has been publishing poetry since 1984. From the start, we have endeavored to assure that the nets on our courts were in good repair and stretched at regulation height. When we began publishing poetry, technical incompetence and what Brad Leithauser, writing in these pages, called "metrical illiteracy" reigned well-nigh supreme in most fashionable poetry circles. In part, this technical poverty was yet another unfortunate legacy of the 1960s: its attack on tradition and its ideology of untempered freedom naturally took aim at the metrical and formal heart of poetical achievement in English. If by 1980 there were few poets still insisting that writing in iambic pentameter was tantamount to abetting political repression, that was chiefly because such souvenirs from the *Kulturkampf* of the 1960s had already done their damage. Readers interested in current examples of the wreckage will wish to peruse the damage report that John Simon furnishes in his review of the 1996 edition of *The Best American Poetry* in this issue.

Mr. Simon concludes his essay on a melancholy note, wondering whether poetry has come to "the end of its tether" and whether "all, or almost all, poems have been written." Certainly, there are ample grounds for concern. The performance of most of the poets in the volume that Mr. Simon reviews—which alternates mostly between pseudo-vatic bilge and adolescent politicized whining—is an incentive to despair. Nevertheless, we firmly believe that "the end of poetry" is no more upon us than its much ballyhooed cousins, "the end of art" and "the end of history": all seem obstinately persistent notwithstanding the dire proclamations of their would-be coroners.

If we are cautiously optimistic about the future of poetry, it is partly because we have over the years managed to attract so many talented poets—both new and established—whose work forms an effective antidote to such pessimism. Daniel Mark Epstein, Dana

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Gioia, Rachel Hadas, Donald Hall, Donald Justice, Jane Kenyon, Brad Leithauser, Frederick Morgan, Herbert Morris, Mary Jo Salter, Elizabeth Spires, Timothy Steele: the work of these and other poets who have appeared in *The New Criterion* testifies to a continuing resiliency in at least some strains of contemporary poetry.

Different as these poets are from one another, what they have in common is an abiding scrupulousness about poetic meter and poetic form. In helping to raise the banner of what has come to be called "the new formalism" in poetry, *The New Criterion* has—in the poetry and the criticism of poetry it has published—played a significant role in fostering a return to seriousness in this realm of cultural endeavor. Our achievements in this regard have been widely recognized by friends and enemies alike, and have been celebrated or disparaged accordingly.

It was with as much surprise as gratitude, then, that we found *The New Criterion* singled out in the latest volume of *The Cambridge History of American Literature*, which is devoted to "Poetry and Criticism 1940–1995." The general editor of the entire history is Professor Sacvan Bercovitch of Harvard University, a longtime radical who whose name, "Sacvan," was given to him by his Communist parents to commemorate the "martyrdom" of Sacco and Vanzetti. Nevertheless, in a section on "Poetry, Politics, and Intellectuals," written by Robert von Hallberg, Professor of German at the University of Chicago, the "new formalism" promulgated by *The New Criterion* is identified as an influential force in contemporary poetry and criticism of poetry that stands in opposition to "the intellectual ascendancy of the Left since the 1960s." Professor Hallberg goes on to observe that "no journal of the Left or Center has made a similar commitment" to serious coverage of the arts.

Of course, we are inclined to agree. But it remains to note that, in championing formal poetry, *The New Criterion* has intended to advocate not an airless aestheticism but a view of poetry—and of cultural endeavor generally—that recognizes the deep connection between formal excellence and artistic potency. Indeed, it is in this sense that *The New Criterion* is a partisan of "tradition." As T. S. Eliot noted in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," tradition is more than just a repetition or "handing down" of the past. "Tradition," he wrote,

> is a matter of much wider significance. It cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour. It involves, in the first place, the historical sense; . . . and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence. . . . This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity.

Thus the cardinal artistic truth—only seemingly paradoxical—that the most genuinely individual artist is also the one who has most assimilated himself to tradition. The formal resources of any art are the most tangible tokens of its spiritual itinerary. Which is why, to quote Frost again, the "figure a poem makes" "begins in delight and ends in wisdom."

The future of the European past

It is no longer news that the history of the European past and its role in shaping American cultural life is under severe attack. In virtually every university that offers a liberal arts curriculum, in every arts institution that deals with the European classics, and in the offices of every publication that engages in intellectual pursuits, the discus-

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sion of the past has become, in effect, the principal battleground for mapping out the future of our culture.

The very concept of a liberal arts education is, of course, an invention of the European past, and traditionally our concert halls, our opera houses, our art museums, and our universities have understood themselves to be the intellectual custodians of that past. Yet in the face of a concerted assault from radical multiculturalists, on the one hand, and left-wing historical revisionists, on the other, the traditional priority given to the European past in American cultural life has been made an issue of fierce and contentious debate.

On the fate of history as a humanistic discipline, including the history of the European past, we are publishing in this issue an analysis by Roger Kimball of an important new book on the subject, *The Killing of History: How a Discipline Is Being Murdered by Literary Critics and Social Theorists* by the Australian writer Keith Windschuttle. The deconstruction of historical truth plays a major role, after all, in the way ideological myths are now regularly substituted for the verifiable facts in recounting the European past and elucidating its bearing on contemporary cultural values. "In the 1990s," writes Mr. Windschuttle,

> the newly dominant theorists within the humanities and social sciences assert that it is impossible to tell the truth about the past or to use history to produce knowledge in any objective sense at all. . . . The central point which history was founded on no longer holds: there is no fundamental distinction anymore between history and myth.

In Europe itself, meanwhile, political and cultural developments raise many questions about the ability of our European contemporaries to deal with a debilitating crisis of confidence in regard to their own most exalted traditions. Immigration from the Third World, the war in Bosnia, the embrace of the most debased varieties of American popular culture, and the spread of religious fanaticism—these are but a few of the factors that have now made the authority of Europe's cultural traditions problematic in Europe itself. The collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe and the loss of faith in the welfare state in Western Europe have created great opportunities for a renewal of Europe, yet the very concept of a centralized European "community" now threatens Europe with a new—or maybe, as David Pryce-Jones reminds us in this issue, a not-so-new—form of bureaucratic collectivism.

It is in the hope of defining and clarifying the issues and implications of this alarming cultural breakdown on both sides of the Atlantic that *The New Criterion* is inaugurating with this issue a series of essays on "The Future of the European Past." Mr. Pryce-Jones's essay, "Ancient Ghosts Stir," which concentrates mainly on France, Germany, and England, is the first of the series that will continue to appear in our pages through the 1996–1997 season. Appropriately, we believe, this essay begins the discussion of the future of the European past by looking at the immense role played by twentieth-century totalitarianism—Nazism and Communism—in shaping the European present and casting doubt on the European future.

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The future of the European past: I

Ancient ghosts stir

by David Pryce-Jones

Born in Vienna, caught in France by the war, I am old enough to remember escaping from the Germans, the sensation of hunger, and the shudder of bombs. A soldier myself in due course, I was stationed with the British army near Düsseldorf, in the Rhineland. At the time, shopkeepers in the mighty Königsallee running through that city used to operate from smashed piles of rubble, their stock of goods on a single tray. Today the Königsallee is a consumer's mecca, and as expensive as real estate anywhere. Much was obliterated or looted in the war, but governments and the whole range of developers have since carried the process further. Hardened old Europe, as Henry James called it, could evidently absorb an awful lot of ruin.

The softened new Europe is not without merit. Nobody starves. Bombs drop only in faraway countries of which we know nothing, like Bosnia. Germans have acquired a democratic outlook. Cities sprout steel girders and plate glass as their commercial districts and industrial zones extend along ring-roads and bypasses toward housing estates, urban sprawl, and finally suburbs. The external glow of prosperity is unmistakable. But a cluster of related political concepts, and their social and moral consequences, conspire to reduce that prosperity to an end in itself. Poverty of spirit is the price to be paid. And absence of culture is not synonymous with well-being.

Definitions of culture, according to the century's most famous poet, do not go beyond notes. Yet everyone has a sense of the thing. Popular culture was the sharing of activities and experience with one's fellows, and also the pointer to the questions of higher culture: what was the nature of fulfillment and completion, and how were human beings to reconcile themselves to this world and the next? Choice and choosing were at the heart of the answer. Worth in an individual was to be judged by the choices he made, and the manner of his choosing. Art had the purpose of showing how choices came to be taken, and how fraught choosing is. Tragedy and comedy elide into one another unforeseeably. Description is the key to the shifts of reality. Differentiated by language, law, and religion, European nation-states had their own particular identities and cultures. But the more closely the artist could show what were the consequences of action, the greater his claim to universality.

The word culture has narrowed its meaning to the point where sentences such as these sound remote. Culture has come to mean some sort of group behavior or gratification, a special interest rather than the expression of a complete personality. Rock culture. Football culture. "The culture of barbarity," said someone interviewed on television about Northern Ireland, while someone else advocated "the culture of civility." Or the Archbishop of Canterbury: "One of society's greatest difficulties is the

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cultural tendency to regard morality as no more than a matter of individual opinion." True no doubt, but he was confusing culture with ethics. Copenhagen, it appears, is this year's cultural capital of the European Union. In practice this turned out to be the staging of a Euro-pride festival, with workshops and exhibitions, and then a parade of thirty thousand homosexuals. The gay culture within the arts and crafts culture, and both within the would-be Euro-culture.

How did higher culture lose its vitality and purpose, coming to rest in the hands of university departments, to be analyzed rather than lived? How did popular culture come to be a range of leisure activities? Matthew Arnold, Julien Benda, Ortega y Gasset, and many more had warned that this might happen; some of them prophetically, others with a touch of neurosis or charlatanry. Things would probably have gone on as before, had it not been for the destructive but historically definitive series of events that led to Nazism and Communism.

For true believers in these comparable ideologies, the individual's fulfillment and completion lay in submission to the collective to which he happened to belong through the unalterable fact of birth into a particular class or race. In human matters down to inessential details, choices were predetermined for him. Traditional culture was incompatible, and Nazis and Communists alike were determined to do away with it. In practice, the universal component of both proved to be standardization through force. Wherever Nazism or Communism held sway, a facsimile of culture was deliberately manufactured, with mass rallies and shows of military strength, gymnastics and folk dancing, and all things mindless. Forbidden to reflect choice, literature and art became aspects of ideology.

The poems of Mayakovsky, the Palaces of Culture and Stalinist wedding-cake architecture, Khatachurian jingles and firing squad prose in the Sholokhov mode were of a piece with the Haus der Kunst, the sculptures of Arno Breker and the models of Albert Speer, the vaporings of Stefan George and Martin Heidegger, the martial tempo of SS Colonel Herbert von Karajan. But in the other scale of the balance was mass murder as a social good.

In one of his essays, Elie Kedourie tells the story of an unknown inhabitant of Baghdad who over a century ago recorded in his diary the tyranny of the ruler of his day. To have witnessed such violence, Kedourie wrote, was itself "a kind of bruised and forlorn glory." However brutal that moment, it was nothing compared to the Europe of the dictators. In the manner of that anonymous inhabitant of Baghdad, there were some who bore witness: Primo Levi, Paul Celan, Tadeusz Borowski, Varlam Shalamov, Mikhail Bulgakov, Solzhenitsyn. More than a forlorn glory, theirs was an envoi. As in the parable of Adam and Eve, there is no going back to innocence.

Accidental or personal as it may seem, choice involves moral discrimination between right and wrong. Nazism and Communism simplified every course of action. You resisted or you collaborated. Bystanders and good Samaritans had no role. Collaborating with these ideologies, the majority of European intellectuals surrendered the capacity to choose of their own free will. An elite that so easily lost its moral authority inspires mistrust.

Nowhere has this been so dire as in France. French literature and painting had set standards against which artists everywhere measured themselves. France, birthplace of the rights of man, was unable to stand up to Hitler's Germany. There seems to have been a failure at every level, psychological and physical and political. Jean-Baptiste Duroselle gave his account of the Thirties in France the bald title *La Décadence*. André Gide was perhaps the foremost French writer of the period. He had seen through the Soviet Union and its deceptions. On the day that the German army marched into Paris without a shot fired, he wrote in his diary that events had revealed the country's profound decay. Soon after-

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wards, he had a gloss: "To come to terms with yesterday's enemy is not cowardice but wisdom; as well as accepting what is inevitable." But Nazi victory was inevitable only if the people chose to let it be so.

When Marshal Pétain and Pierre Laval and their colleagues announced their collaboration with Hitler, unquestionably almost everyone in France was relieved. The record shows how readily French intellectuals accepted the opportunities and careers opened to them in the France of a military governor, of Otto Abetz, the German ambassador, and Dr. Karl Epting of the German Institute. Abetz is credited with the crack that the powerhouses of Europe were the Vatican, the Communist Party, the Prussian general staff and the *Nouvelle Revue française*. With its chaste white cover and red and black lettering, the *NRF* fell into line along with everyone else. Gerhard Heller, an official of Goebbels's Ministry of Propaganda, was the censor who placed the swastika stamp of approval on books and plays and journals. His is the autobiography of a man proud to have been accepted at the center of Parisian intellectual life.

A few like Albert Camus, François Mauriac, and André Malraux actively resisted in their ways. Jean-Paul Sartre was only one among many who claimed to resist but actually presented his work to be stamped with the swastika. Another famous German to spend the war in Paris was the novelist Ernst Jünger, whose diaries describe social life much as it had been prewar. He visited Picasso's studio, where German officers were keen buyers. You and I, Picasso observed one day to Jünger, could resolve the war in twenty-four hours.

Some sort of moral reckoning did occur. Laval was one of seven hundred executed for treason. The *épuration*, or purge, was haphazard and vindictive. As early as 1953, frightened authorities decreed an amnesty. Collaboration is a subject so hedged in with legal restrictions that it cannot be written about with honesty, and therefore festers.

In the Nazi wake came the Soviet occupation of Eastern Europe, fronted by local Communists or their colleagues or masters who had spent the war in Moscow. The archives have not yet revealed exactly what Stalin's intentions were as he toyed with extending into France and Italy, possibly elsewhere, too, the series of coups that secured Eastern Europe. Party activists in France and Italy, until lately armed partisans and *franc-tireurs*, expected to seize power, and were never to recover from disappointment that they were not permitted to do so.

Hardly had the German officers left his studio than Picasso was drawing his "peace" symbols on behalf of the Soviet Union and publicly proclaiming that "one goes to the Communist Party as to a spring of fresh water."

The slow grind was instead put into motion to convince electorates to vote for the Party. The archives do reveal Moscow's comprehensive purpose and the gigantic sums of money expended on it: tens of millions of dollars in France and Italy, and the placing of thousands of agents of influence, especially in Germany. A British Communist has described how he used to pick up an annual suitcase with a million pounds in cash from the Soviet Embassy. Speeches of Communist deputies in the French National Assembly were drafted for them in Moscow. Those who had ruled France for Hitler had not sunk so low in obeisance.

Prewar fellow travelling had been a personal affair, a self-deception arising from character, often with misplaced idealism. Postwar collaboration was its extension into a mass movement of opinion. For almost half a century, a pro-Soviet climate bloomed in the face of all evidence about the true face of the Soviet regime. Hardly had the German officers left his studio than Picasso was drawing his "peace" symbols on behalf of the Soviet Union and publicly proclaiming

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that "one goes to the Communist Party as to a spring of fresh water." Countless lesser men and women shared the agility of his careerism. Any element of idealism was soon lost in venality.

By means of the Moscow subsidies, local Communist Parties built up impressive patronage networks. In addition to their own declared outlets, they controlled or influenced newspapers, radio, and then television channels; they packed committees with power to promote Party writers and artists, set up front organizations, festivals, summer camps, and youth movements; ensured that Marxist courses were taught in schools and universities, and infiltrated even religious bodies. The Soviet future seemed a fact of life.

Alleged to be "bourgeois," cultural and moral standards were attacked unremittingly. Largely worthless writers and artists became household names: natural born commissars like Louis Aragon and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Genet, Althusser, Pasolini and many an Italian film-maker, Renato Guttoso and many a painter, and of course Bertolt Brecht, whose style of Party propaganda spread from East Berlin to become the prototype of contemporary theater. Never mind the earlier swastika stamps, Sartre justified the Soviet cause throughout the Cold War. Soviet wrong-doing could not exist, he argued, and if it did then it was a duty to hide it. He went so far as to deny the existence of Gulag. Vicious controversies engulfed George Orwell, Arthur Koestler, Raymond Aron, Karl Popper, and anyone else who criticized the new climate of opinion as once they had criticized Nazism.

Fortunately the Soviet world folded up without the loss of life and physical damage of the war against Nazism. Reputations have evaporated along with the subsidies. The Sartres and Brechts and their imitators look like creatures of long-spent fashion, the equivalent of flappers in cloche hats. But this time there has been no moral reckoning. To date, only François Furet in his book *Le Passé d'une Illusion* has attempted any systematic account of how such a range of intelligent people let themselves be duped into betraying fundamental human values. Conceding that former Communists like himself were wrong all along the line, he nevertheless tries to argue that in the context they could not have acted otherwise—a banal cancellation of his own apologia.

Freed from the external onslaught of collective ideology, it might be supposed, the human being and his fate could again become the cultural preoccupations that they once were, at the center of literary narrative and artistic representation. But all the while a secondary process of collectivism was undermining any such outcome.

Each country in Europe is now a democracy, and every one of them is also a modern welfare state offering its citizens rights at least to housing, education, and healthcare, "from cradle to grave." The origins of the welfare state are mixed. Philanthopists sincerely wished to improve the general lot by abolishing long-lasting inequities and injustices. Bismarck believed that this was the way to have better soldiers. Voted into power, the social democratic wing of Marxism saw it as a vehicle for the slogan "to each according to his needs." But only the Cold War brought about its full realization. In the deeper intentions of those who introduced it, the welfare state would pre-empt revolution in general, and the Soviet Union in particular.

When the British welfare state came into existence, its architect, William Beveridge, wrote to the then prime minister, Clement Attlee. He was proud to survey his handiwork, he declared, but went on to wonder whether he might not have subverted the British character. In theory, people were to have more choices to do with their lives what they wanted and so to fulfill themselves. But were politicians not tampering with the values that gave the individual his worth? Hitherto, people had been obliged to take responsibility for themselves; now the state would shoulder that responsibility.

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People once used to think long and hard about breaking up their families, having an abortion, bearing children out of wedlock, committing criminal or anti-social acts. Responsibility for oneself entailed the punishment and shame of wrong choices, the recognition and approval of right choices.

By means of the welfare state and its many and various agencies, choices that determine the lives of others have been widely handed to officials and bureaucrats, the panoply of inspectors, social workers, therapists, consultants, managers, and not least politicians exchanging benefits for votes. That part of the population sustained by the welfare state forms the dependency culture, as powerful as it is immobiling. As Beveridge suspected, actions cease to have consequences. Instead of right and wrong choices to be rewarded or punished, there are only cases to be dealt with.

Everywhere, of course, there are intellectuals and artists capable of contributing to the high culture they inherited. Quite unwittingly, the democratic welfare state is the main factor that inhibits such contribution, stifling what it aspires to foster. The array of Beaux Arts, English Heritage, and other preservation lobbies, the Arts Councils and Ministries of Culture, either take the past out of circulation and place it in pickling jars, or sponsor a uniform present, touristified, or more often than not, "experimental." In Venice, the Assessore per la Cultura spoke for all this kind. "The town is packed with dynamic academics who are reconsidering all the ways in which this deeply traditional city functions," and he went on: "Instead of just consuming—wearing out—the art of the past, we need to add new cultural experiences, we need to use culture as a strategic variable in the reorganization and development of the town."

On May 9, alleged to be Europe Day, the French government staged a thousand musical events. In Britain there are five hundred and fifty festivals, and in June alone there were twenty-three hundred officially sponsored musical events. Government funding on the one hand underwrites low culture, and on the other favors those who can manipulate the bureaucracy into patronizing someone or something they think chic. From both directions, high culture is shut out by institutions, including universities and publishing houses and the media, that otherwise would be supportive.

Comedy treats of manners, but there can be no manners unless they are widely shared and codified. Tragedy treats of choices mistakenly made for genuine reasons. Art that deals with "cases" devalues comedy and tragedy to a point of meaninglessness.

Is there a European artist or writer born since 1945 for whom universality is an aim?

When everything is relative, any one course of action is as valid as another. And a case is merely a lifestyle. Young authors in Britain, Salman Rushdie pointed out, can talk about nothing except contemporary English lifestyles. Is there a European artist or writer born since 1945 for whom universality is an aim? Junking liturgy, bowdlerizing the Bible and prayer book into populist and sometimes ungrammatical lingo, the Catholic and Protestant churches have transformed even religion into an alternative lifestyle. In Germany, "churches have organised rave parties for the young," in the words of a recent article, and have held markets and mounted theatrical productions in them, "including a play with a topless actress and Christ with a gas-mask."

Brutalism, structuralism, deconstruction, post-modernism, minimalism, the Nouveau Roman, the *théâtre sans texte*, magical realism, and the rest of it, testify to the effort to thrash a way out of the predicament by discovering some sort of art as free from the whole business of choice as society itself is. This spreads the disease for which a cure is sought. The novel, the poem, the picture, history, morality itself, degrade into the entertainment business.

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I asked one of Germany's leading literary editors about the state of culture there. "It is a disaster," was the answer. Over two-thirds of the books published are translations. This year's best-seller is a feminist fairy tale, *Good Girls Go to Heaven*. In his novel *Exemplary Lives*, a quarter of a century ago, Siegfried Lenz explained that, in view of their past, Germans could no longer decide what were right or wrong choices. Günter Grass believed that Hitler was not a matter of choice at all, but some kind of spell. German identity is the overwhelming topic. The likes of Hans Magnus Enzensberger or Martin Walser are serious about it; the plays or films of Fassbinder and Herzog and Heiner Müller and Peter Weiss are self-pitying. In half a century there has been no controversy as intense as the *Historikerstreit*. What looked like an argument between historians about the reciprocities between Nazism and Communism, was in fact commentary upon the national effort to forge a post-Hitler identity with which the Germans can live. How deep is the self-searching? Marcel Reich-Ranitski left his native Poland to become an influential literary critic. Lately, his former links with the Polish Communist secret police were exposed. All he could find to say in self-defense was that he owed the Germans no explanation. That was enough to quieten the scandal.

Umberto Eco, Leonardo Sciascia, Italo Calvino, managed to escape the sovietized stranglehold on Italian culture. Over three thousand literary prizes and festivals too numerous to be counted testify to local opportunity. In the window of the leading bookstore in Florence, though, the novels on sale were by Alison Fell, David Lodge, Patricia Highsmith, José Saramago, Kenzaburo Oe, Michael Crichton, Sten Nadolńy, John Fullerton, Peter Mayle, and finally an Italian, Romano Battaglia, with *Alle Porte della Vita*.

In Paris, I was unable to find a single painter or sculptor with an international reputation. Over ten years ago, Milan Kundera confessed to nostalgia for Paris but could not help seeing it as "the disappearing capital of a disappearing world." The current crop of Gallimard novels are by Jean-Denis Bredin, François-Régis Bastide, Daniel Pennac, Alina Reyes, Dominique Rolin, Gilles Coupet, Anna Wiazemsky, Patrick Modiano, and Jean d'Ormesson (whose title, *Presque rien sur presque tout*, seems to sum up the situation).

The June 1996 issue of the *NRF* carries lead articles about two Americans, Jack Kerouac and Jerome Charyn, followed by a section "L'Algérie des Ecrivains." The conclusion of an essay about Algerian intellectuals by the well-reputed Muhammad Dib is characteristic (the translation is mine): "Included in a world of signs, figuring themselves as signs in the great concert of signs, they communicate only through signs, not often understandable, and under the influence of the spread, more or less increased, or diminished, of the slightest oscillation." Perhaps applauded in the *hautes écoles*, this is hardly going to scare off the Islamic fundamentalists putting Algeria through fire. Virtually nothing is left of this former powerhouse (or of Otto Abetz's other three, come to that). That same month, *L'Infini*, a rival highbrow journal, had a lengthy essay on Francis Bacon by Philippe Sollers, once a surrealist, and then a story by David Bowie, once a pop singer. This concerned the dismemberment of a fourteen-year-old and the translator and editor praised it as "authentically criminal art."

Britain is a still stranger swirl of prank and perversity. A London art-gallery recently removed its roof in order to winch down some sheep whose fleece had been dyed pink. Elsewhere a young actress lay naked in a glass box for a week. For cementing a house, someone else was awarded a prestigious prize. Another bright hope has filled a gallery with thousands of shapes in human form, cut from tin or waste paper, all of them being swept away by dummy cleaners into litter bags.

Excrement is treated as one among other pigments. Helen Chadwick's *Piss Flowers*

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were cast from stains left where she had urinated on snow. Dinos and Jake Chapman have made a film in which two women fellate the penis-shaped nose of a decapitated mannequin. In a gallery, this same pair exhibit figures of children who are naked and hideously mutant, Siamese twinned randomly, with penis-noses, anus-mouths and vagina-chests. Damien Hirst, a young artist in vogue for sawing a cow in half, delivers himself of profundities in a quality Sunday newspaper: "I like taking my clothes off. I have a lot of friends who are like that, do you know what I mean? Pissing, shitting. Getting our dicks out. I guess we're just like weeping babies underneath." Hirst's cow was exhibited among other British sculptures in Paris, prompting the organizer of this show to reflect, "What strikes me most is this tremendous strength British sculptors have, which is the ability to banish the notion of tastefulness."

Blasted, a play staged at the Royal Court, was summed up by one critic with the words: "Seedy journalist has sex with retarded girl; soldier rapes back, then eats his eyes; and all in a hotel in Leeds during a civil war." This playwright's latest offering is an "improvement" of a classical Greek theme. Hippolytus, as one reviewer put it,

> is a terminal depressive who spends his time eating burgers, watching junk television and masturbating into his socks. Phaedra nevertheless gets the hots for this deeply unfanciable representative of Generation X, and administers oral sex. The recipient is so bored that he just carries on eating. Theseus rapes his daughter to enthusiastic cheers. Hippolytus has his penis cut off and grilled on a barbecue.

In remotest rural Wales, where the population is composed of sheep-farmers and has not increased in size since 1300, a theater company put on *Vagina Dentata*. This play, according to the local newspaper, begins with three women shooting the only male character, supposedly the writer and director of the play. A spokesman claimed, "It's like Chekhov on speed. It's a post-modern tragedy that plays with itself." Summoned in aid like this, a great writer is also diminished.

All Ways Six Steps is a modern dance that the choreographer Sasha Waltz staged as a part of a festival in London. Its setting is a bedroom. As the Sunday *Times* critic describes, "A Peter Pan creature floats in, so amoral that he tries to flatten Waltz (whom he has just married) between the upturned bed and wall, and, failing that, to squash her into a drawer. Another sinister young man also radically rearranges the furniture, balancing the armchair and dressing tables on the top edge of the walls. None of it makes sense, but then it's not meant to. I'd happily see it again."

Awarded for the first time this year, and worth £30,000, the Orange Prize is restricted to women writers. Its winner, Helen Dunmore, was praised for "a hypnotic story of incest in the English countryside." The Betty Trask prize, hardly less valuable, is for romantic fiction. Graham Lord, one of its judges this year, complained at what he had to read. One novel concerned a drunken young Scottish woman "in which we are treated to a suicide, an orgy, porn videos, masturbation, lots of vomiting and a scene in which our heroine wakes to find that the man she picked up the previous night has defecated on her stomach because she was too drunk to have sex." Another novel was *Marked for Life* in which "a tattooed all over homosexual is assaulted with a candle by his wife, whose mother lives with a lesbian lover. There's a lot of vomit in this one too." Louis Doughty's *Crazy Paving* was "awash with foul dialogue, graphic descriptions of masturbation, menstruation and vomiting." *Clever Girl*, by the twenty-eight-year-old Tania Glyde, mentions in the first few pages "a dog's sexual excitement, dildoes, various bodily fluids, child abuse, loveless sex, lavatory paper . . . and other things too crude to reprint."

Daily life, to be sure, offers examples for

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such art to imitate. One Paul Scarrott, for example, was reported to have died at the age of forty in a Spanish hospital after a drinking bout. In a single year he had nineteen convictions in court, and been jailed thirteen times for offenses at football matches. His specialities were carrying offensive weapons and inciting the crowd to violence. A young man arrested for urinating on the wall of my local police station thought it a full explanation to say to the magistrate, "I did it, that's all." The most popular of the BBC's radio programs has a breakfast show. Its presenter, a young man, used to have a slot, "I'm in bed with my boyfriend." Lately, he rounded on a guest with the sentence, "Anthea, how about we get together while I kick you in the mouth?"

Many consider that the case for decadence is proven. Some years ago the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre was already warning that Britain stood on the brink of moral illiteracy, so that a concept such as "good" or "just" was becoming inapplicable. In the opinion of Robert Harris, a popular author who is also a leading columnist, Britain "is becoming dumber as well as coarser." The historian and commentator Paul Johnson speaks of the country's proletarianization, whereby the young are dragged down into "the gutter culture," degraded by those who ought to know better. An official report on standards of education states that many seven-year-olds are unable to read; they seem likely to be functionally illiterate adults. Another report finds that nearly half those aged between eleven and fifteen never pick up a book. Students no longer understand an allusion to the Bible or the classics. A high court judge, a woman too, publicly suggested that marriage had outlived its usefulness. Selling in millions, the tabloid newspapers hero-worship assorted drug addicts and hooligans, pop stars and television personalities, sports figures, chefs, models, and designers.

Popular culture displays what Matthew Arnold described as "the plain faults of our animality." He foresaw the anarchy in which "this man and that" can "smash as he likes." In a society apparently indifferent to choice, artistico-smashers are able to express themselves only in a competition of shock. Assertion replaces fulfillment. Lifestyle replaces responsibility. That admired tastelessness is the tantrum of the infant against the arrangements of the daycare center.

Neither life nor art can do anything with infantilism. Within living memory, the critic made it his business to build a reef—in an image of Desmond MacCarthy's—that protects the lagoon of literature from the restless sea of nonsense and confusion. Whether out of fear to be unfashionable or from loss of moral authority, critics even come to praise what they hate. That is a novelty.

In a society apparently indifferent to choice, artistico-smashers are able to express themselves only in a competition of shock. Assertion replaces fulfillment. Lifestyle replaces responsibility.

Here, for instance, is the distinguished chairman of the Arts Council, once a poet, reviewing some new fiction. "I do not wish anyone to be dismembered by a chainsaw, raped, have their head smashed in a football game, to engage in bestiality or to be sodomized by a mad mortuary attendant seconds after their demise." All this, he continues, is here "conducted with such brio, and with so much narrative pace and accuracy of ear that his book is both revolting and exhilarating." By chance today, as I write, *The Times* has another equally routine example. The critic says that while here is "the first novel that made me physically sick, it is also one that held my attention utterly rapt." This fiction about a serial killer of young homosexuals is praised for its color, texture, wit, intelligence, and so on. A whole lexicon of critic's adjectives—shocking, irreverent, outrageous, relevant, provocative, disturb-

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ing, challenging—are the equivalent of mental-health warnings.

Disturbed as they are, bereft of moral authority, in cultural disarray, the populations of Europe are now caught inescapably in yet another collectivizing experiment. Over the last four or five decades, a handful of politicians, the Germans and French to the fore, have been organizing among themselves the formation of a federal structure, ultimately a single state structure, for all the countries of Europe. A capital in Brussels, a limited and unrepresentative parliament with power to spend but not yet to tax, a budget raised from contributions by national governments, not one but two European courts of justice with powers to override national courts, a president and a score of commissioners who are not elected but self-appointed, and ten thousand bureaucrats, are already in place. Centralized decision-making by officials is replacing democratic legislation. A bewildering torrent of directives and regulations control and standardize every aspect of daily life and commerce. In an invisible and usually whimsical tangle of wheeling and dealing, careers, fortunes, industries, whole regions thrive or fail. Irrespective of historic experience, law, language or tradition, the nation-state is to become extinct, and all by decree.

Pan-European or vaguely Esperantist visions date from the last century. At the outset, the model for the present arrangement no doubt had idealistic impulses to avoid any repeat of war, but it came out of the matrix of Nazism and Communism with many conscious or unconscious borrowings.

"The United States of Europe" was the title of an article Leon Trotsky wrote for *Pravda* a few years after the 1917 revolution. European countries would unite in a socialist federation, he believed, as a prelude to a world socialist federation. This remained Soviet doctrine.

A construct superimposed by political will, federal Europe is a mimicry of the old Soviet Union in many respects. Those who set up its institutions were also believers in state control and protectionism. Whether at political or financial levels, politicians and their officials are not held accountable.

The Maastricht treaty embodies what its French critics openly call "the spirit of Vichy." Where once Hitler and Pétain shook hands, Chancellor Kohl and President Mitterand stood side by side holding hands.

There is no proper auditing. Billions of dollars, probably as much as a third of the entire Brussels budget, goes missing. Venality in the form of subsidies, tax credits, perks, bribes, and horse-trading has long since eroded idealism. An unprecedented number of leading European politicians and businessmen are in prison or on trial for corruption. Those operating the complex central system form a nomenklatura uncannily resembling those who lately were rich and privileged solely through membership in the Communist Party.

As also in the old Soviet Union, independent nations of different cultures and languages are to federate on a basis ideologically pre-determined for them. This construct is artificial, an act of pure political will. Naturally people try to defend their historic identity, and the resulting backlash of nationalism, xenophobia, and racism excites the very horrors that federalism is supposed to exclude. Separatist groups everywhere are ready and willing to resort to violence in what is seen as defense of the nation and its culture. Ancient ghosts stir. Federal Europe is reproducing the defect that above all others put paid to the Soviet Union.

Since 1940, the Franco-German relationship has been guilty, not to say sadomasochistic. "In Europe, Germany alone decides," Hitler declared in August 1942, and he further asked of the French, "Can we absorb them with advantage?" In his view, the

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so-called New Order was to be a federal structure in which France would provide goods and services. In September 1943, with Hitler's consent, Albert Speer and the French Minister of Production Jean Bichelonne set up a planning council as a preliminary toward an economically integrated Europe. Ambassador Otto Abetz was arguing that the French ought to be equal partners. The question, he explained to Bertrand de Jouvenel, is "whether you will proceed of your own free will."

Germans of all sorts, from Nazi intellectuals like Carl Schmitt and Werner Best to Ernst Jünger and some of the 1944 conspirators against Hitler, were writing reports to define the New Order. Among several Nazi think-tanks working to that end was the so-called Society for European Economic Planning, under Werner Daitz, an associate of Alfred Rosenberg. SS General Otto Ohlendorf created the think-tank in the Ministry of Economics that came closest to projecting what could actually occur. Although he was responsible for mass-murder in Russia (and hanged for it after the war), Ohlendorf was an intellectual, a trained economist. He argued that a Nazi economic order would have to reconcile a free market with the state's role as main contractor and purveyor.

Correspondingly, thoughtful French collaborators saw convergence or alliance with Germany as the sole effective way to overcome defeat. *Anthologie del la nouvelle Europe* was an influential book edited by Alfred Fabre-Luce and published in 1942. Force was admirable, he argued in a lengthy introduction, and Nazi aims were sound, though limited as they stood. For the sake of a higher form of European supremacy, France and Germany would have to sacrifice national sovereignty—it was a way of seeming to de-Nazify without actually doing so, merely taking out the racial sting. "Will Germany show itself worthy of the European task?" Fabre-Luce asked. "It is a question of engaging France and Germany in a common enterprise to affirm their solidarity." As the war ended, he was arrested for the sentiment.

Unification in 1989 seemed like a civilian return to German primacy on the continent. Chancellor Kohl and his aides repeat ever more insistently that Germany must be locked into a federal Europe and tied down, or else it will revert to its bad old ways. Entrenched by now, the French instinct is to disarm potentially hostile strength by acquiring a share in it. Through the Maastricht treaty, both countries finalized committment to a common enterprise. The treaty embodies what its French critics openly call "the spirit of Vichy." Where once Hitler and Pétain shook hands, Chancellor Kohl and President Mitterand stood side by side holding hands. German tanks once again drove down the Champs Elysées, though only in a parade. In a final presidential speech, in Berlin, Mitterand praised the bravery of German soldiers in the war, and in a posthumously published book discovered in Prussia the virtues of enlightenment. It is the New Order as envisioned by Ohlendorf and Fabre-Luce. In this perspective, Laval and others executed for treason were simply premature Euro-fanatics.

Europe has a Commissioner of Culture, a middle-ranking Spanish official, as it happens. What passes for European culture is nothing of the kind, but entertainment of a mass nature, consisting of football matches and other sporting events, television co-productions, the Eurovision song contest (in which the recent British entry was called "Ooh Aah Just a Little Bit"), lotteries, and other commercial or marketing promotions. As the legacies of Communism and Nazism work themselves out, a populist and collectivized welfare state of continental proportions looms, in which genuine choice is more and more restricted, culture more and more marginalized. Prosperity is promised in return. In the next few years, people will have to decide whether to consent to these plans of their political masters or reject them. In either case, they are likely to discover how much more ruin there is in Europe.

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Reflections on the history of "Partisan Review"

by Hilton Kramer

Walter Bagehot, writing in 1855, observed that "it is odd to hear that the *Edinburgh Review* was once thought an incendiary publication." That was approximately half a century after the *Edinburgh Review* had been launched by Francis Jeffrey, Henry Brougham, and Sydney Smith on its career of critical controversy and political partisanship. Younger readers of *Partisan Review*, coming to that venerable journal in 1996, more than fifty years after its founding by William Phillips and Philip Rahv, might be forgiven for entertaining a similar sense of wonder about a magazine that has enjoyed the status of an established institution for as long as they can remember. Its days as an "incendiary publication" have likewise passed into history.

As a consequence, attempting to explain to younger readers in the 1990s what it meant in 1937 to launch a literary magazine in New York that was at once Marxist, pro-modernist, and anti-Stalinist is likely to entail a feat of historical elucidation not unlike that required to explicate some of the more arcane mysteries of medieval Christian theology for a modern audience of the heathen. The lineaments of an entire historical epoch need to be reconstructed for even a minimal understanding of its impulses and orthodoxies to be grasped. It is not only that the pillars of Marxist belief have now crumbled beyond repair. Modernism, too, though it still accounts for the greatest artistic achievements of the twentieth century, has itself become an object of deconstructivist orthodoxy.

As for Stalinism and the fierce political and intellectual resistance it met with in the heyday of its influence in this country—a resistance in which *Partisan Review* played a significant role—that is another phenomenon that is nowadays only vaguely understood. About the cultural as well as the political consequences of Stalinism, our historians are only now—thanks, in part, to the opening of the Soviet archives—beginning to tell the full story of what amounted to a massive and largely successful campaign of ideological brainwashing, conspiracy, and intimidation. Add to all this the general level of historical ignorance about matters large and small that obtains even among the so-called educated classes, and you have a situation in which almost nothing about the cultural life of this century can any longer be taken for granted.

It is clearly as an attempt to correct this situation as far as the history of *Partisan Review* is concerned that Edith Kurzweil, who now serves as an editor of the magazine, has assembled a new anthology called *A Partisan Century: Political Writings from Partisan Review*.[1] There have, of course, been several earlier anthologies drawn from the pages of *Partisan Review*. *A Partisan Century*

1 *A Partisan Century: Political Writings from Partisan Review*, edited by Edith Kurzweil; Columbia University Press, 409 pages, $49; $19.50 paper.

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differs from these in being wholly drawn from the magazine's political writings, which, because *Partisan Review* was always primarily a literary magazine, may in some respects be considered the most perishable part of its history. That this turns out not to be entirely the case is itself a reflection of the special position that *PR* (as it came to be called) has occupied for a good deal of its history.

For *PR* is a literary magazine that was founded as a consequence of a decisive political quarrel, and it was in the nature of that quarrel that it did much to determine the way the journal subsequently conducted itself *as* a literary magazine. The original *Partisan Review* was a quarterly created in 1934 as a publication of the John Reed Club, itself an organ of the American Communist Party. Its program—the Party's line at the time—was largely devoted to the promotion of so-called "proletarian" literature. This first *Partisan Review* proved to be short-lived, however. Two of its young editors, William Phillips and Philip Rahv, were soon discovered to be unacceptably critical of the "revolutionary" writing favored by the Party hierarchy. They were promptly accused of "bohemian individualism"—a serious charge in Communist circles—by the literary editor of the weekly *New Masses*, the Party's principal cultural journal.

Before that dispute could be resolved, however, the Party received orders from Moscow to shut down its network of John Reed Clubs. These were now to be replaced by another creation of the Party—the League of American Writers—signaling a shift in the international Party line. The call for a literature that supported a Soviet-style revolution and stigmatized bourgeois writers as class enemies was suddenly abandoned in favor of an alliance with "antifascist" liberals that included a good many of those very same bourgeois writers.

What had happened, of course, was the emergence of Hitler as a credible threat to Stalin's plans for the Soviet Union. Stalin now needed allies in the Western democracies for his "antifascist" crusade. In 1935, the new line was proclaimed by the Comintern as the Popular Front, which effectively supplanted the earlier "united" front in the service of the revolutionary proletariat. None of this had anything to do with an interest in literature, of course, but it completely altered the way literature was now to be assessed by the Communists and their literary fellow travelers.

As a Trotskyist critic sardonically observed at the time: "Sinclair Lewis has been miraculously transformed from a petty-bourgeois writer, who turned his back upon the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat, into a literary hero of the Popular Front." Many other middlebrow talents, theretofore denounced in Communist circles as reactionary lackeys of capitalist exploitation, were now similarly embraced as progressive exponents of the Kremlin's "antifascist" crusade.

Liberals flocked to this new progressive banner. The Comintern's Popular Front proved, in fact, to be an immense success. To this day, moreover, the history of its role in shaping the future course of American cultural life—not only in the 1930s but for a considerable period thereafter—has never been written. The Popular Front mind—intellectually middlebrow, artistically philistine, politically "progressive," and both sentimental and simplistic in its views of human nature and the nature of the Soviet Union—became a staple of American cultural life. It exerted enormous influence on Hollywood movies, the Broadway theater, popular fiction, mainstream journalism, the academy, the liberal clergy, and the liberal weeklies. "What had happened," wrote Robert Warshow in an essay called "The Legacy of the 30s" (1947), "was more than the defection of one part of the intelligentsia. The whole level of thought and discussion, the level of culture itself, had been lowered." It was in this sense that a good deal of American cultural life may be said to have been Stalinized, and at certain intervals—in the cultural revolution of the

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1960s, for example, and with the imposition of political correctness and multiculturalism in the 1980s and 1990s—has been repeatedly re-Stalinized ever since.

It was the distinction of the new *Partisan Review*, which was re-launched in 1937 as an independent left-wing literary journal, that it set itself in open opposition to this Stalinization of culture and politics. The magazine's literary, artistic, and critical loyalties were now more openly highbrow and modernist. Its general political orientation remained Marxist, but what this meant in practice was to be a source of conflict within the magazine itself for some years to come. The new *PR*'s political identity was, in any case, more clearly established by the magazine's enemies—the Communist Party and its literary fellow travelers—than by its own political avowals.

Even before its first issue was off the press in December 1937, the new *PR* was castigated in the *New Masses* and the *Daily Worker* as "fascist," "Trotskyist," "slanderers of the working class," "agents provocateurs," and so on, and it wasn't long before the liberal weeklies joined the Stalinist chorus, with Malcolm Cowley denouncing the magazine in *The New Republic* as "anti-Soviet" and a perpetrator of "literary crimes." By the time the latter charge was brought, *PR* had already published fiction and poetry by Elizabeth Bishop, Delmore Schwartz, Wallace Stevens, James Agee, Eleanor Clark, Louise Bogan, and Dylan Thomas, and criticism by Edmund Wilson, Meyer Schapiro, and William Troy. Cowley had meanwhile written a rousing defense of the Moscow Trials for *The New Republic*. It was a measure of the power enjoyed by Stalinist orthodoxy at that moment—1938—that Cowley could bring the charge of "literary crimes" against *PR* without being thought ridiculous. On the other hand, it was the rhetorical violence of the Stalinists' attack on the revamped *Partisan Review* that instantly established it as an "incendiary" journal.

On the new board of editors at *PR*, William Philips and Philip Rahv were joined by Dwight Macdonald, Mary McCarthy, F. W. Dupee, and George L. K. Morris. Macdonald was in some respects the most militant in his political radicalism, espousing a brand of Trotskyism with which, for better or worse, *PR* became identified for a time. It is one of the disappointments of *A Partisan Century*, by the way, that Edith Kurzweil has not felt under any obligation to clarify the editors' rather muddled relation to Trotsky and his ideas in these early years. He was clearly a much respected figure in *PR* circles—rather too respected, considering his political crimes in the early years of the Bolshevik regime. He was published in *PR*—Professor Kurzweil reprints a piece on "Art and Politics" from 1938—and his assassination in 1940 was treated as a momentous event. (*A Partisan Century* reprints James T. Farrell's eulogy to "the Old Man," as Trotsky was affectionately known among his admirers. Omitted, unfortunately, is Dwight Macdonald's even more effusive tribute to Trotsky.) The exact extent to which the Old Man served as a political mentor for *PR* remains as blurred as ever in this volume.

By the early 1940s, however, *PR* had already won a firm place for itself as a literary magazine of considerable distinction. In its issues for 1941, in quick succession it published T. S. Eliot's "The Dry Salvages," W. H. Auden's "At the Grave of Henry James," and Elizabeth Bishop's "Three Key West Poems," and began a regular series of "London Letters" by George Orwell. The following year, it again published Eliot—this time an essay on "The Music of Poetry"—as well as Marianne Moore's memoir of *The Dial*, fiction by Saul Bellow and Edmund Wilson, and reviews by Robert Penn Warren, Weldon Kees, and Randall Jarrell. The magazine was well on its way to being the premier American literary journal of its time.

Owing, however, to conflicts among the editors as to what a properly Marxist or socialist response to the war should be, the political course of *PR* in the early years of

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the war was a good deal more problematic. These conflicts ripened into a full-fledged factional dispute when, in the July-August issue of 1941, the magazine published "10 Propositions on the War," a socialist manifesto drafted by Macdonald in collaboration with Clement Greenberg, who was now a member of *PR*'s board of editors.

This hopelessly obtuse political declaration, which Professor Kurzweil reprints in *A Partisan Century*, confidently predicted that "in the war or out of it, the United States faces only one future under capitalism: Fascism." It was therefore firmly believed that "to support the Roosevelt-Churchill war regimes clears the road for fascism from within and blocks the organization of an effective war effort against fascism outside." It thus followed that "all support of whatever kind must be withheld from Churchill and Roosevelt."

And what, in the view of these militant socialist theorists, would "an effective war effort against fascism" consist of? "The only way this conflict can be won in the interests of mankind as a whole," the manifesto concluded, "is by some method of warfare that will transfer the struggle from the flesh of humanity to its mind. Such a method is offered only by the cause of socialist revolution."[2]

This exercise in utopian Trotskyite nonsense proved to be too much for Philip Rahv, who promptly dismissed the Greenberg-Macdonald manifesto as "a kind of academic revolutionism which we should have learned to discard long ago." (Rahv's response is also reprinted in *A Partisan Century*.) "The orthodox Marxists," Rahv wrote, "thought that the imperialists of both camps will exhaust themselves and then they will take over." He pointed out, however, that "there has been no stalemate; England has survived, but her continental allies have all suffered total defeat. Now Russia is next, and if Stalin fails to stem the invasion it won't be a Trotskyite but Hitler's Gauleiter who will be installed in the Kremlin."

No sooner had Rahv's response been published in the November-December 1941 issue of *PR* than the United States was indeed at war, thanks to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, and in its first issue for 1942 *PR* now took the position of having, in effect, *no* position on the war. In a statement signed by the editors, the magazine acknowledged that "for some time . . . the editors have disagreed on major political questions" and would henceforth "express themselves on the [war] issue as individuals." *PR*'s main task now, said the statement, is to preserve cultural values against all types of pressure and coercion."

Yet even this concession to socialist piety failed to satisfy Macdonald, who was intent upon playing the academic revolutionist. The issue was settled for Clement Greenberg—for the moment, anyway—when he went into the U.S. Army. Macdonald proved to be recalcitrant. As William Barrett later observed: "For him every venture into politics was a leap toward the Absolute." He quit *PR*, declaring that the magazine was no longer political enough, and promptly started his own magazine. It was called, appropriately, *Politics*, and its position on the war might best be described as high-minded pacifism, while its views on other political matters cleaved more to a variety of libertarian anarchism than to Marxist socialism. After *Politics* folded in 1949, Macdonald took a sabbatical from politics to write for *The New Yorker*, a magazine he had hilariously ridiculed in the first number of the reborn *PR* in 1937. It wasn't until the 1960s, when the Vietnam War and the emergence of the counterculture provided yet another Absolute he could pursue with impunity, that he returned to the political wars.

It may well be asked: Why, more than half a century after these sometimes solemn,

2 It is worth recalling that the United States was not yet officially at war when this was written. Yet most of continental Europe was already under Nazi control, Japan was advancing in its conquest of Asia, and Britain was still conducting its lonely struggle for survival.

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sometimes comic-opera contretemps, is it still worth recalling the political twists and turns that animated them? In retrospect, after all, Dwight Macdonald was never a serious political thinker—nor, for that matter, was Philip Rahv. Compared to its brilliant contributions to literature and the arts, moreover, *PR*'s contribution to political thought was, with one exception, never either clear-headed or dependable. Its single shining virtue as a political journal was the anti-Communism that derived from the editors' early rejection of Stalinism, yet even that great virtue was severely compromised in the radical uproars of the 1960s. As Professor Kurzweil discreetly acknowledges, in the 1960s there was "a lessening of the magazine's anti-Communism."

Yet it is precisely in such surrenders to political and cultural accommodation that the history of *Partisan* and its literary circle does so much to illuminate the moral temper of the period the magazine has traversed. A more thorough examination of *PR*'s political history than is provided by *A Partisan Century* would be obliged to address itself to a grim paradox: that the literary journal which established its political and cultural independence in the heyday of the Popular Front and carried the anti-Communist banner in the Cold War of the 1950s, so readily succumbed once again to the totalitarian temptation in the 1960s.

Among the editors who guided the breakaway *PR* in 1937, three thoroughly disgraced themselves in the Vietnam War period: Dwight Macdonald, who made common cause with the anti-intellectual, anti-democratic radicals whose pop-culture values he had spent his whole professional career ridiculing; Mary McCarthy, who volunteered her services as an apologist for the Communist regime in North Vietnam, going so far in the process as to vilify George Orwell for *his* anti-Communist writings; and Philip Rahv, who ended his days as what Frederick Crews aptly described as a "born-again Leninist," and capped the debacle of his career by mounting a Stalinoid attack on one of the writers—Henry James—to whose work he had devoted some of his own best writing. By the end of the 1960s, the betrayals perpetuated by these writers were more frequently to be found in *The New York Review of Books*, but *PR* was clearly doing its best to keep up with the radical momentum already established by *The New York Review*.

In this connection, it isn't entirely accurate to claim, as Professor Kurzweil does in her introduction to *A Partisan Century*, that *PR* always "eschewed trendy politics." However true this was in the late 1930s, when *PR* was bucking the Stalinist tide, it was no longer the case after the Second World War. By the 1950s, certainly, its politics were distinctly "trendy." To its great credit, *PR* went very far in embracing the pro-American, pro-Western "trendy politics" of liberal anti-Communism during the Cold War years of the 1950s, and to its discredit it gave warm welcome to the anti-American, anti-Western politics of the Vietnam War period in the 1960s.

To the re-Stalinization of the political Left in the 1960s *PR* offered a lot less resistance than it had mustered against the original Stalinist assault thirty years earlier, and to the re-Stalinization of culture in the 1960s it offered scarcely any resistance at all. Over time, to be sure, the magazine has fortunately recovered some of the ground it had ceded to the radical Left in the darkest days of the anti-war movement and the counterculture. Its symposium on "The Politics of Political Correctness" in 1993, for example, is one of the best discussions of the subject that we have. (*A Partisan Century* reprints Steven Marcus's valuable contribution to that symposium, an essay called "Soft Totalitarianism.") Yet there is no denying that the 1960s caused great damage to the magazine. Its position of intellectual leadership fell hostage to the authority of the new radicalism and the "new sensibility."

All of this would have been made a lot clearer to readers in 1996 if Professor Kurzweil had not omitted certain watershed contributions to *PR* from the late 1960s.

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Take, as an egregious example, Susan Sontag's contribution to the magazine's symposium on "What's Happening to America?" in the Winter 1967 issue. This was the piece that contained the never-to-be-forgotten assertion that "the white race *is* the cancer of human history; it is the white race and it alone—its ideologies and inventions—which eradicates autonomous civilizations wherever it spreads, which has upset the ecological balance of the planet, which now threatens the very existence of life itself." In a volume purporting to trace the course of *PR*'s political history, this remarkable pronouncement—the most extreme expression of racialist ideology ever to appear in the magazine—certainly merited a prominent place. This wasn't Malcolm X or Eldridge Cleaver speaking. This was the doyenne of the "new sensibility." Yet this historic utterance is passed over in favor of Sontag's better-known "Notes on 'Camp.' "

Frankly, I think this omission represents a failure of nerve—to use a phrase that *PR* once made famous. So does the omission of that other emblematic expression of the "new sensibility"—Richard Poirier's essay, "Learning from the Beatles," in the Fall 1967 issue of *PR*.[3] By that time, alas, it was no longer very clear to the readers of *PR* as to who was actually in charge of the magazine's affairs. Rahv, though his name still appeared on *PR*'s masthead, had decamped to a professorship at Brandeis, and was very outspoken—among friends, anyway—in his bitter denunciation of the "swingers" who had seized control of the magazine. *PR* had meanwhile moved to Rutgers, where Richard Poirier was installed as an editor. William Phillips remained as chairman of the magazine's editorial board, but it was no secret that he wasn't entirely happy with *PR*'s new alliances.

It wasn't until he was able to take the magazine to the more conservative intellectual environment of Boston University that *PR* began to regain some of its old footing. Yet by then the magazine, with Mr. Phillips still in charge, faced a different kind of challenge: how to remain a recognizably liberal journal when so many of its actual intellectual affinities now lay with writers and artists whose loyalties are more conservative than *PR* wished to be seen to be. That, it seems to me, remains the dilemma of *Partisan Review* at the present time.

For certain writers and intellectuals of my own generation, however, the earlier *Partisan Review*, the magazine we were first drawn to in the late 1940s and early 1950s, will always occupy a special place in our experience. At that moment in our lives, *PR* was more than a magazine. It was an essential part of our education, as much a part of that education as the books we read, the visits we made to the museums, the concerts we attended, and the records we bought. It gave us an entrée to modern cultural life—to its gravity and complexity and combative character—that few of our teachers could match (and those few were likely to be readers of or contributors to *PR*). It conferred upon every subject it encompassed—art, literature, politics, history, and current affairs—an air of intellectual urgency that made us, as readers, feel implicated and called upon to respond. If, later on, we began to question the perfect confidence that *PR* seemed to bring to its pronouncements on every issue, and to understand the unacknlowledged contradictions that lay concealed beneath its style of apodictic authority—well, that too was an essential part of our education.

Elsewhere, to be sure, there were critics who did more to shape our comprehension of the disciplines that interested us—B. H. Haggin and Virgil Thomson on music, Edwin Denby on dance, Stark Young and Eric Bentley on theater, and the New Critics

3 "Well, sometimes they are like Monteverdi," wrote Mr. Poirier, "and sometimes their songs are even better than Schumann's." And: "It could be said that they know what Beckett and Borges know but without any loss of simple enthusiasm or innocent expectation, and without any patronization of those who do not know." In the end, the Beatles were firmly placed among "the very great."

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on poetry. On political matters, too, Elliot Cohen's *Commentary* soon outdistanced *PR* as the principal intellectual organ of liberal anti-Communism. Yet well into the 1950s, despite the quarrels and recantations and expulsions that marked its history in that still misunderstood decade, *PR* retained its authority for us—and not only for us, as I quickly learned when I made my own first contribution to the magazine as a critic.

In the spring of 1953, I sent an essay on the contemporary art scene to Philip Rahv, whom I had met the summer before at the School of Letters in Indiana. (I had gone there to study Dante with Allen Tate and Shakespeare with Francis Fergusson.) Much to my astonishment, Rahv accepted the piece and promptly published it in the July/August issue of *PR*. I had already published some literary criticism elsewhere, but this was my debut as an art critic and I quickly discovered that, owing to the intellectual authority which *PR* then enjoyed, publication in the magazine was in itself a ticket to a career I wasn't yet certain that I wanted. Invitations to write for other publications—including one from Clement Greenberg to contribute to *Commentary*—soon came pouring in, and I woke up one fine day to discover that the world, or at least the part of it with which I was now becoming acquainted, considered me a professional art critic.

It was then that I began seeing a good deal of Philip Rahv, first in New York and then in Boston when he took up his appointment at Brandeis. I liked him—when the spirit was upon him, he could be very generous and wildly funny—but I never quite trusted him. Listening to the scurrilous things he habitually said about his closest friends and colleagues, I never doubted for a moment that he was likely to be saying the same sorts of things about *me* to *them*. I somehow knew the day would come when I, too, would be classed as an enemy.

And so it did in the early 1970s, not long before his death. A few years earlier, when he broke with *PR* to start his own magazine, called *Modern Occasions*, he asked me to write something for it, and I did—an essay on art and politics. He then asked me to join his staff as managing editor. This I declined to do, and not only because I was then happily employed at *The New York Times*. The prospect of placing my professional life in Philip's hands was simply unthinkable. By that time, it was plainly evident that the principal mission of *Modern Occasions* was the settling of old scores, real or imaginary, with Rahv's former colleagues at *PR*. I was horrified by the attacks he published on Clement Greenberg and Lionel Trilling, and told him so. Yet he continued to importune me for further contributions, and the end came when I told him I would be sending my essay on "The Age of the Avant-Garde"—the introduction to my first book—to Norman Podhoretz at *Commentary*, not to *Modern Occasions*. He never spoke to me again, though I gather he had much to say *about* me to his circle of young acolytes in Boston.

I did not get to know William Phillips until after Rahv's death. We've had our disagreements, and will no doubt continue to have others, but I nevertheless consider him a friend. And the feat he has achieved in keeping *Partisan Review* going, through good times and bad, is unequaled, I believe, in the entire history of American literary journals. It is doubtful, moreover, that *The New Criterion* would be what it is today if *PR* had not been what it was when I discovered it more than half a century ago. Let me close, then, as I began, by quoting Walter Bagehot. "If in the [preceding] pages we seem to cavil and find fault," wrote Bagehot, "let it be remembered, that the business of a critic is criticism; that it is *not* his business to be thankful; that he must attempt an estimate rather than a eulogy." That is what I have thought important to attempt here.

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"The Killing of History": why relativism is wrong

by Roger Kimball

Accustom your children constantly to this; if a thing happened at one window, and they, when relating it, say that it happened at another, do not let it pass, but instantly check them; you do not know where deviation from truth will end.
—*Boswell's Life of Johnson*

There are no facts, only interpretations.
—Friedrich Nietzsche

Where is Dr. Johnson when we need him? How well could we profit from his scruples when it comes to the question of truth. For we live at a time when truth is everywhere under attack. I am not talking about anything arcane or polysyllabic: just plain, factual truth, as in "The battle of Agincourt took place in October 1415" or (more generally) "The documents support my claim and do not support his."

It is perhaps easy enough to discount some of the more florid examples of the assault on truth. I daresay that few sensible people take seriously the claims of Holocaust deniers. What is significant, however, is the *way* in which such extreme doctrines tend to be dismissed. Increasingly, they are repudiated not as pernicious falsehoods—the response that Dr. Johnson would have insisted upon—but as more or less unfortunate "perspectives" or "points of view," the gospel being that everyone is "entitled" to his own such hobbyhorse, no matter how flagrantly at odds with the truth it might be. Never mind that such an attitude not only disparages truth, but also erodes the legitimacy of serious opinion.

Or take the recent movies directed by Oliver Stone. Anyone who looks into the matter knows that Mr. Stone's portrayals of Presidents Kennedy and Nixon are exercises in (left-wing) political fantasy. Yet the popularity of such movies testifies not—or not only—to the political commitments of those who patronize his movies. It also testifies to the public's capacious appetite for historical "reconstruction": that is, its appetite for history glamorized and minus the burdensome requirement to tell the truth—history, to put it in a word, "lite." Dr. Johnson would not have liked history lite.

There are no doubt many reasons for this development. One important reason is the degree to which Western intellectual elites—in the media, the world of culture, and above all in the academy—have reneged on their commitment to truth. This abdication has a long and complex heritage. And it comes in many forms and degrees of finality, from various modes of trial separation to, in extreme cases, irrevocable divorce. As always in the world of ideas, what matters is not so much the existence but the influence and prevalence of such commitments. In the present case, the cavalier attitude toward truth has reached epidemic proportions. It has, indeed, become part of the intellectual furniture of our age, presupposed rather than argued for.

One depressing sign of this situation is

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the absolute horror with which the idea of "objective truth" is regarded in chic academic circles today. Another is the widespread tendency to downgrade facts to matters of opinion—a tendency that follows naturally from the rejection of objective truth. This shows itself in the amazingly prevalent assumption that truth is "relative," i.e., that the truth of what is said depends crucially upon the interests, prejudices, even the sex or ethnic origin of the speaker rather than—well, than the truth or falsity of *what* the speaker says. The basic idea is that truth is somehow invented rather than discovered. Typical of this position is the feminist complaint about "male-centered" epistemologies that make false claims to universality (another word that inspires panic) or objectivity.

The Harvard historian Simon Schama provided a more genteel expression of this attitude toward truth in the Afterword to his best-selling harlequinade, *Dead Certainties* (1991). "The claims for historical knowledge," Mr. Schama assured his readers, "must always be fatally circumscribed" —*fatally* circumscribed, mind you—"by the character and prejudices of its narrator." In other words, the limitations of the historian make the achievement of historical truth impossible. How many college-educated people today would dare to dissent from this assertion? Mr. Schama was at pains to deny that his was a "naïvely relativist position"; yet at bottom, his claim is little more than a chummy periphrasis for Nietzsche's famous declaration of nihilism: "There are no facts, only interpretations." It is unfortunate that we lack a squadron of Dr. Johnsons: they might remedy the situation considerably by applying a series of refutations like that delivered against Bishop Berkeley's idealist philosophy. Except in the case of the Michel Foucault, who might have grown overly fond of Johnson's method of refutation, the results would almost certainly be salutary.

Not surprisingly, the flight from truth has had especially devastating consequences in the academy. Among other things, it has undermined the integrity of many academic disciplines—has, in fact, done much to undermine the very idea of an academic "discipline," that is to say, a field of study with a generally agreed upon subject matter and shared tools of inquiry.

The dizzy proliferation of "studies" programs is an important sign of this decay. Women's studies, gay studies, Afro-American studies, Chicano studies, peace studies, textual studies: the metastasis of these and other such pseudo-subjects in the academy betokens not the extension but the breakdown of academic disciplines. It is worth stressing that such programs, though advertised as "cross-disciplinary," are in reality *anti*-disciplinary; they require not the mastery of multiple disciplines but the abandonment of disciplinary rigor for the sake of fostering a prescribed ideology. The paradigm of all such efforts is "cultural studies," an alarmingly popular intellectual solvent that is characterized not by its subject—which can be anything at all—but its attitude. The two mandatory ingredients for cultural studies are (1) political animus and (2) a hostility to factual truth; "content" is entirely discretionary.

To date, the assault on truth in the academy seems to have been most damaging to the study of literature—partly because departures from factual truth are not always so readily detectable when the subject is literature, partly because departments of literature were among the first to capitulate to such trendy and destructive fads as deconstruction, structuralism, and cultural studies in all its unlovely allotropes. But few if any subjects have escaped unscathed. Philosophy, law, art history, psychology, anthropology, sociology: all have been playing an aggresive game of catch-up with literature departments in this regard. Even history, whose raison d'être, one might have thought, was a commitment to factual truth, has suffered. So, too, the natural sciences: the theory and philosophy of science—if not yet the actual practice of science—have increasingly become hostage to sundry

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forms of epistemological incontinence, as the logic and substance of science is deliberately confused with the sociology of science. According to some observers, such ideas have even begun making headway in schools of business management and accounting—though regrettably not, it seems, among those accountants employed by the Internal Revenue Service. A splendid chap called Nicholas Fox, who lectures in English medical schools, may have provided this week's *ne plus ultra* of social constructivism. In his book *Postmodernism, Sociology and Health* (1993), Mr. Fox assures readers that such terms as "patient" and "illness" are "sociological fictions" that can be cleared up by "elements of feminist theory and Derridean concepts of *différance* and intertextuality."

Many of these developments have been duly noted and criticized. Indeed, beginning in 1987, with Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind*, a small but steady stream of books and articles have appeared to take issue with one or another dimension of the academic assault on truth. My own book, *Tenured Radicals* (1990), belongs on this list, as do David Lehman's *Signs of the Times: Deconstruction and the Fall of Paul de Man* (1991) and Paul Gross and Norman Levitt's superlative anatomy of the so-called "science wars" in *Higher Superstition: The Academic Left and Its Quarrels with Science* (1994). The latest contribution to this genre of dissent is also among the most devastating, intellectually sophisticated, and wide-ranging in its indictment. Written by an Australian historian called Keith Windschuttle, the book is titled *The Killing of History: How a Discipline is Being Murdered By Literary Critics and Social Theorists*.[1] If the title seems a tad lurid, rest assured that the evidence that Mr. Windschuttle assembles to make his case amply justifies the strong rhetoric. Although published by an obscure house (a fact that tells us a great deal about the priorities of academic publishing today), this is the most important work of cultural criticism to have appeared all year—indeed, in many a year.

In form, *The Killing of History* is a kind of intellectual Baedeker. It provides readers with a lively tour of the exotica that has come to predominate in the humanities and social-science departments of most English-speaking colleges and universities. Having lived among the natives, Mr. Windschuttle has sampled much local fare; he knows all about curiosities like semiotics, and how they got to be that way; he understands the chief local dialects, and can discriminate nicely between structuralism and post-structuralism, deconstruction, post-colonialism, and social-constructivism; he knows the best way across the desert of Michel Foucault's "anti-humanism" and is adept at extricating himself from the swamp of postmodern literary theory; above all, he arms his readers against the cranks, charlatans, and intellectual shysters that populate these environs: he has sage advice for dealing with purveyors of radical skepticism and scientific relativism, as well as commonsense tips for avoiding those who pretend that history is merely a species of fiction.

For all this, however, Mr. Windschuttle is right that *The Killing of History* is not "yet another boring book about theory." His focus throughout is firmly on the discipline of history: on what it should be and how those who deny the claims of empirical truth undermine the core of historical analysis. "For most of the last 2400 years," Mr. Windschuttle writes in his preface,

> the essence of history has continued to be that it should try to tell the truth, to describe as best as possible what really happened. Over this time, of course, many historians have been exposed as mistaken, opinionated and

1 *The Killing of History: How a Discipline is Being Murdered By Literary Critics and Social Theorists*, by Keith Windschuttle; Macleay Press, 298 pages, $24.95. This is the second edition, a corrected and expanded version of a book that was first published in Australia in 1994; only the current edition has been distributed in the United States.

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often completely wrong, but their critics have usually felt obliged to show they were wrong about real things, that their claims about the past were different from the things that actually happened. In other words, the critics still operated on the assumption that the truth was in the historian's grasp.

Today, these assumptions are widely rejected, even among some people employed as historians themselves. In the 1990s, the newly dominant theorists within the humanities and social sciences assert that it is impossible to tell the truth about the past or to use history to produce knowledge in any objective sense at all. They claim that we can only see the past through the perspective of our own culture and, hence, what we see in history are our own interests and concerns reflected back at us. The central point upon which history was founded no longer holds: there is no fundamental distinction any more between history and myth.

As Mr. Windschuttle acknowledges, this attack on historical knowledge is not new; in essence, it goes back at least to Nietzsche ("no facts, only interpretations"). What *is* new is the prestige and currency that such ideas now enjoy. Over the last decade or two, highly contentious ideas that once subsisted at the fringe of academic speculation (where they belong and can even do some good as a kind of intellectual irritant) have been embraced by the heart of the profession. No longer is the attack on factual knowledge confined to a handful of disgruntled metaphysicians: it has become common coin among mainstream historians and their academic publishers. And if there are still plenty of historians who quietly uphold traditional standards of historical inquiry in their own work, precious few are willing forthrightly to criticize the assault mounted against their discipline. This is due partly to the vice, endemic among academics, of pusillanimity; but it is also due partly to the fact that many historians whose basic outlook is traditional have themselves begun dabbling in the stew of anti-empiricism, blithely unaware, as Mr. Windschuttle notes, that they are "embracing assumptions that have the capacity to demolish everything they stand for." This is not hyperbole. The idea that observation and inductive reasoning provide no legitimate grounds for historical knowledge; that truth is relative; that language is a kind of "prison house" referring always to itself, not reality: Mr. Windschuttle is right that "if historians allow themselves to be prodded all the way into this theoretical abyss, they will be rendering themselves and their discipline extinct."

As is the case in literary studies, a common feint is to say that the whole controversy is merely evidence of "generational conflict," that objections to "new methods" are just the bleatings of old fogies resisting the "innovations" of Young Turks. As Mr. Windschuttle points out, however, most of the so-called "new ideas" were put into circulation by scholars in their forties and fifties; "the movers and shakers of this movement," he notes, "are the old New Left crowd from the 1960s . . . obviously not so new these days but just as addicted to the latest fashions as they were in the days of hippy beads and flared trousers." The difference, of course, is that in the 1960s such figures occupied the periphery of academia. Now they dominate it: "Since 1985, the dissidents have expanded their territory enormously. Although they still like to portray themselves as embattled outsiders, they are today the ones making all the running—devising new courses, contracting the publishers, filling the new jobs, attracting the postgraduate students." Those professors whose intellectual and moral convictions might lead them to fight against these developments are generally "too busy, too tired or too bemused" to object; their inaction has conferred unwonted legitimacy upon their opponents, allowing them to consolidate their authority and perquisites.

Mr. Windschuttle's ambitious aim in *The Killing of History* is twofold: first, to describe the assault on factual truth in all its fuliginous variety; second, "to show that, despite all the present claims to the con-

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trary, history can be studied in an objective way and that there are no philosophical obstacles to the pursuit of truth and knowledge about the human world."

Regarding the former, Mr. Windschuttle provides an intelligent and well-informed trip through the major theories now contending for dominance in the humanities and social sciences; much of this material will be familiar to anyone who has been following recent debates about the fate of higher education. But even here Mr. Windschuttle has much to offer. For one thing, as his subtitle suggests, he shows, in more detail than has been attempted hitherto, how the attack on history has proceeded largely by the application to history of hermetic, French-inspired literary theories such as deconstruction and (via the anthropology of Claude Lévi-Strauss) structuralism. Along the way, he shows how the barbarous jargon and obscure writing that characterize so much contemporary academic prose is often pursued not out of any intellectual scrupulousness or profundity but as a kind of stratagem. "Obscurity," he notes, is "a clever way to generate a following"—not least because many people mistakenly assume that obscure writing is indicative of deep thinking. Then, too, there is something self-perpetuating about an addiction to obscurity: students who have labored to master a difficult argot will naturally be reluctant to acknowledge that the jargon they have expended so much effort to learn is intellectually bankrupt. Moreover, those who are seduced by obscurity often exhibit the correlative vice of assuming that what is clear is superficial—or worse. A follower of Derrida called Mas'd Zavarzadeh gave the show away when he dismissed a critic of the master because of his "unproblematic prose and the clarity of his presentation"—features, we read, that are "the conceptual tools of conservatism." Horrors!

The really significant contribution that Mr. Windschuttle makes in this book, however, is his defense of objectivity and factual truth. He speaks, it should be said, primarily as a working historian, not as a philosopher. That is to say, although Mr. Windschuttle's discussion is philosophically sophisticated (especially compared to the work of most of his opponents), his chief concern is not with the abstract possibility of objective truth, but rather with its achievement—or failure—in specific works of history. This, in fact, is the greatest strength of *The Killing of History*. Mr. Windschuttle makes his case concretely by using "the work of real historians to combat their theoretical opponents."

Proceeding through a series of specific historical case studies, Mr. Windschuttle subjects the new historical theories to a kind of "road test" to see how they handle on "the rougher terrain of actual historical subject matter." The events in question include the European discovery of America and Spanish conquest of Mexico; the British discovery and exploration of the Pacific islands; the foundation of the European settlement in Australia; the history of mental asylums, hospitals, and penal policy in Europe; and the fall of Communism in 1989. The events that Mr. Windschuttle adduces are appropriate because they have attracted the attention of many of the trendiest and most influential representatives of the theories he wishes to criticize. His procedure is to present the account of a given historical event from the perspective of "theory," and then to show up the deficiencies of that account using the work of more traditional historians. Given Mr. Windschuttle's aim of recuperating historical truth, it is hardly surprising that in every case the traditionalists come out on top. What is noteworthy, however, is the care and thoughtfulness with which he proceeds. He takes great pains to present the rival accounts fully and fairly; and the aim of his rebuttals is not to make debater's points but to articulate common-sense objections to "theory" and cultural relativism that have application well beyond the specific cases he discusses.

Consider, for example, the way that Columbus's discovery of the New World

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and the Spanish conquest of Mexico have been discussed by *bien pensants* academics over the course of the last decade. It has not only been inveterate, politically-correct historical romancers like Kirkpatrick Sale who have taken the opportunity to portray Columbus as an evil marauder and the Indians as pacific, environmentally sensitive creatures who lived in blissful harmony with each other and the earth. In 1992, Oxford University Press published *American Holocaust: Columbus and the Conquest of the New World* by the historian David Stannard in which, as Mr. Windschuttle reports, we read that "The road to Auschwitz led straight through the heart of the Americas"—a comparison that Mr. Windschuttle rightly dismisses as "not only wildly anachronistic but conceptually odious." Occurring at a moment when political correctness and theory-inebriation were both at high tide, the quincentenary of Columbus's discovery of America called forth all manner of dubious pontification among literary critics, historians, anthropologists, and other academics eager to outdo each other disparaging the legacy of Europe (and, by extension, the United States) and celebrating the virtues of victimized indigenous peoples.

The eminent semiotician and literary theorist Tzvetan Todorov had already produced one of the most depressing foretastes of what was to come in *The Conquest of America* (1982). Todorov had a little of everything. Language-besotted academics could savor his assurance that it was "by his mastery of signs [that] Cortés ensure[d] his control over the ancient Mexican empire." (Never mind that Spanish military technology was vastly superior to that of the Aztecs.) The politically correct were soothed by his condemnation of European imperialism and such assertions as "The sixteenth century perpetrated the greatest genocide in human history." There was the added bonus of Todorov's palaver about Columbus, and European culture generally, being unable to deal appropriately with "The Other"—i.e., with "the existence of a human substance truly other, something capable of being not merely an imperfect state of oneself."

As Mr. Windschuttle notes, one of the many problems for Todorov and others who champion the indigenous peoples of the Americas against their European conquerors is "the widespread practice of human sacrifice which prevailed at the time of the Spanish conquest." The Aztecs, the Mayans, the Incas, the Caytes, the natives of Guyana, and the Pawnees and Huron tribes of North America: all practiced human sacrifice, often on a huge scale (the Aztecs alone murdered several thousands a year), sometimes accompanied by cannibalism. The Caytes, for example, ate the crew of every wrecked Portuguese ship they found. "At one meal," reports an anthropologist cited by Mr. Windschuttle, "they ate the first Bishop of Bahia, two Canons, the Procurator of the Royal Portuguese Treasury, two pregnant women and several children." Todorov, Mr. Windschuttle concludes,

> wants to impose a moral judgement on the Spanish conquest, and yet he also wishes to play down the issue of human sacrifice so that his readers will still see the Aztecs as victims who have the greater virtue and who deserve greater sympathy. To do this he is forced to argue that all human societies are guilty of systematic mass murder, only some are more guilty than others. But once the distinction between sacrifice/massacre societies evaporates, he is left with nothing but a common human nature to explain the murderous proclivity of the species. And the idea of a common human nature is something that his whole book was designed to deny.

The amalgam of an anti-European bias, political correctness, and a resistance to empirical evidence is a conspicuous feature of many of the writers that Mr. Windschuttle discusses in *The Killing of History*. In his chapter on the founding of Australia, for example, Mr. Windschuttle introduces readers to a book by Paul Carter called *The Road to Botany Bay* (1987). George Orwell, writing about Mahatma Gandhi, made the

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observation that saints ought to be considered guilty until proven innocent. Be that as it may, it is certainly a good principle to employ when dealing with books, like *The Road to Botany Bay*, that come with endorsements from Edward Said ("Astonishingly original methods of cultural research . . . a compelling work of great intellectual power") or Susan Sontag ("A brilliant book for many appetites"). Writing about the early history of the British in Australia, Carter proposes a new sort of historical analysis, "spatial history," to take the place of the "linear, narrative history" (which he also castigates as "imperial history") furnished by other writers. Festooning his text with quotations from Derrida, Giles Deluze, and (not incidentally) Edward Said, among others, Carter seeks to explore how "space is transformed symbolically into place, that is, a space with a history."

Among many other things, Carter wants to recapture the experience of the British convicts who early on populated Australia and who, according to Carter, were model subversives in that they rejected Enlightenment empiricism and imperialism. His difficulty is that the world view of the convicts can only be viewed through the "distorting mirror" of those in authority because, Carter says, the narratives and journals recording firsthand the convicts' experiences have been lost. His solution is to apply "spatial history" to the accounts of "ruling-class chroniclers" in order to "recover from the Enlightenment logic of cause and effect something of what that logic suppressed. In particular, we may be able to recover that dimension of the convict's existence which imprisonment and transportation were specifically designed to exclude: his occupation of historical space." There is, of course, a lot that might be said about this sort of hermeneutical legerdemain. But the fact is, Carter needn't have been nearly so ingenious. He claims that an act of imaginative reconstruction is necessary to recover the convict's experience. But, as Mr. Windschuttle points out,

> the Australian convicts produced more documents recording, in their own words, their observations and activities, their dreams, hates and loves, than almost any other underclass in history. Moreover, there have been more history PhDs, lectureships and chairs in Australia earned from this source material than from almost any other single topic. The convicts have provided Australian academics with one of their major industries.

In other words, the "arrogance of Carter's claim to rescue the convicts from oblivion is equalled only by his total ignorance of what Australian historians have been writing for the last forty years."

Mr. Windschuttle performs similar services for many other academic stars, including one of the shiniest, Michel Foucault. Part of what made Foucault such an enormous academic hit was his posture of anti-bourgeois radicalism combined with his insistence that the truth is always and everywhere a coefficient of power. It is worth noting, however, that Foucault first made his reputation as an historian of such institutions as mental asylums, hospitals, and prisons. In every case, Foucault's basic tack was to argue that Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment efforts to reform these institutions were really alibis for the extension of state power.

In his first book, *Madness and Civilization* (1961), for example, Foucault contrasts the happy time of the Middle Ages when the insane wandered freely from town to town or traveled on a literal Ship of Fools up and down the Rhine. The birth of the asylum, according to Foucault, was a dark day for the insane, for not only were they now incarcerated, but also they were denied the status of human beings. Foucault makes similar claims about hospitals and penal policy. As Mr. Windschuttle shows in devastating detail, in every case Foucault's account is widly inaccurate. For example, there was no Ship of Fools as Foucault describes; his dates are often wrong by a century or more; and as for the treatment of the insane, the historian Andrew Scull sets

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the record straight: "Where the mad proved troublesome, they could expect to be beaten or locked up; otherwise they might roam or rot. Either way, the facile contrast between psychiatric oppression and an earlier, almost anarchic toleration is surely illusory." Mr. Windschuttle makes the more general case: "Madness became an issue of public policy with the rise of democratic, egalitarian societies, primarily because these societies accepted the madman not as *the other*, or as someone outside humanity, but as *another human being*, as an individual with the same basic status as everyone else."

Although most of the examples that Mr. Windschuttle cites in *The Killing of History* come from the academic Left, it is worth noting that the Left has no monopoly on anti-empiricism. Consider, for example, the celebrated "end of history" thesis put forward by Francis Fukuyama in the late 1980s to explain the fall of Communism. Fukuyama's major philosophical inspiration for his thesis about the end of history came from the German philosopher Georg Hegel. But Mr. Windschuttle shows how "end of . . ." theories (art, philosophy, history, whatever) have been catnip to anti-empirical thinkers from Communists like Alexandre Kojève to Arnold Ghelen, a social psychologist for the Third Reich who, writing about art in 1961, assured his readers that "the process of development has been completed, and what comes now is already in existence: the confused syncretism of all styles and possibilities—posthistory." Mr. Windschuttle demolishes the "end of history" thesis, noting that

> One of the important consequences of an empirical approach . . . is that history cannot be determined. The historical process is not moving inexorably in one direction or towards any goal or end; it has no hidden pattern or itinerary waiting to be discovered. The job of the historian is not to search for some theory that will reveal all, nor some teleology that will explain the purpose of things. Rather, it is to reconstruct the events of the past in their own terms.

The detail and historical specificity that Mr. Windschuttle brings to his analysis make his criticisms especially devastating. But in the end his task is not to discredit particular historians or theorists, but to rehabilitate a view of history that links it firmly to the possession of factual knowledge. As Mr. Windschuttle puts it, "The study of history is essentially a search for the truth." This is not to say that history cannot exhibit literary distinction, as works by (for example) Gibbon, Macaulay, and Tocqueville surely do. But it is to say that history is not the same as literature and that "those who insist that all historic evidence is inherently subjective are wrong." Mr. Windschuttle is quick to acknowledge that historians, like the rest of us, start from a particular point of view and bring with them their own biases and preconceptions. But so what? The fact that "one of the most common experiences of historians is that the evidence they find forces them, often reluctantly, to change the position they originally intended to take" shows that historians need not be imprisoned by subjectivity. And this brings him to the important insight that those who deny the claims of empirical truth in the name of cultural relativism and of overcoming "Eurocentricism" merely replace one European perspective—traditional empirical historiography—with another: cultural relativism. "Those who accept cultural relativism," Mr. Windschuttle points out, "argue that Western ways of knowing do not deserve any privileged status." But at a time when what Mr. Windschuttle calls "the return of tribalism" threatens many parts of the world with a descent into barbarism, to embrace cultural relativism is also to embrace the "charnal house politics" that have brought such misery and destruction to Sri Lanka, the Sudan, Central Africa, the Balkans, and elsewhere. This indeed is where the arcane theories of Derrida, Foucault, and their epigoni collide with the real world. They abandon the constraints of empirical truth in the name of liberation. But what they wind up with is not freedom but a new and more terrible servitude.

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Mistaken identities

by John O'Sullivan

In his *New Yorker* review of the recent biography of Philip Larkin, Martin Amis gave a strong defense of Larkin against the charges of sexism, racism, moral squalor, and so on, then making the literary rounds. Much of this defense was built around the idea that Larkin had grown up and lived at a time when racism, as now defined, was so common as not to invite censure, and when sexism did not exist as a category of sin into which one could fall. But, perhaps feeling that he needed to guard Larkin against the secondary charge of making no effort at all to move when the times did, indeed of resisting any such movement with determination, Mr. Amis embarked on the following philosophical exercise:

> Larkin the man is separated from us, historically, by changes in the self. For his generation, you were what you were, and that was that. It made you unswervable and adamantine. My father has this quality. I don't. None of us do. There are too many forces at work on us. There area too many fronts to cover. In the age of self-improvement, the self is inexorably self-conscious. . . . [Larkin] couldn't change the cards he was dealt.

Mr. Amis here is making an important point and two minor mistakes. The first minor mistake is of thinking of his father, Kingsley Amis, as some kind of typical spokesman for his generation. That must be one of the stranger effects bred by familiarity.

The second mistake is the familiar one of generational parochialism. We all have the illusion that the world in which we grew up was a much more stable one than that in which we make our adult way. And because life itself is a training in psychology, we naturally see ourselves and our friends as more complex, variable, and interesting than the simple manly men and womanly women whom we met around our parents' dinner table. This illusion led Mr. Amis to get his dates wrong. The concept of the self, or of personal identity, as something changeable, uncertain, and shaped and continually reshaped by external pressures goes back at least to David Hume and, as we shall see, has been a staple of modern literature and psychology for about a century.

Mr. Amis's important insight, however, was that this concept of identity has developed so radically—the self being now seen as almost infinitely malleable—and has been so widely popularized, moving from the philosophy lecture room to the cinema, that it is now challenging a much older religious and social concept of identity, built around such ideas as conscience and the soul. This modern theory of identity has

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This essay is based on a paper delivered at a conference, "On Conservative Realism," in Windsor, England, the proceedings of which will shortly be published by HarperCollins U.K., as *Conservative Realism: New Essays in Conservatism* (256 pages, £14.99 paper).

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broken out of the laboratory and, as in a 1950s science-fiction movie, is stalking through the town, inserting itself into the heads of regular citizens, and transforming them into other-directed aliens. And since how we think of ourselves determines so much, from the upbringing of children to the treatment of criminals, the conflict between these two theories is of literally human proportions.

Of course, both theories start out with a great deal in common: namely, that an individual identity is put together from three elements, or three sets of elements. The first is that set of psychological abilities which seem to be innate to all human beings and which become evident in the early years of childhood. These are consciousness, memory, and the moral sense.

Consciousness makes us aware of our existence separate from others. Memory extends that awareness backward through time. And the moral sense tells us the terms on which we should deal with those others. Consciousness, memory, and the moral sense together generate that aspect of identity we call the conscience. This is more than just a voice telling us not to take wrong actions in the here and now. It forces us to feel moral responsibility for past actions, and so helps to establish identity as something that exists through time.

Let me illustrate the point. It is sometimes said of a vicious criminal who has undergone a moral transformation in prison and performed great charitable or scholarly works, that he should be released because he is clearly "no longer the man who committed the crimes." But would the criminal himself agree with this? Ian Brady, the Moors murderer who tortured and killed several children, became a Christian in prison. He is on record as saying that someone who has committed such crimes has indefinitely forfeited any right of release. Another such criminal might, of course, wish to be released, but almost certainly on the grounds that he had purged his offenses. If so, that too would be an admission of a continuing moral responsibility and so, in effect, a claim of identity extending through time. Indeed, the great likelihood is that criminals like the "Birdman of Alcatraz," who seemed to experience a moral transformation, performed their good works precisely because they felt they were the same men who had committed the monstrous crimes and they wanted to build up an equally impressive list of services on the opposite side of the moral ledger. They wanted to atone.

Conscience is, of course, common to all human beings except psychopaths and editors. Memory, consciousness, and the moral sense are, however, only the first building blocks of identity. They make us aware of our individuality, but they do not alone constitute it. The second set of qualities making up identity is our genetic inheritance from our particular parents. It is this inheritance that sets us on the road to being individuals by laying down our potential abilities, tastes, and temperaments. Psychologists seem to have established that this inheritance is extraordinarily rich and influential. We are, it seems, predisposed by our individual genes to have a particular level of IQ, to enter particular occupations, to attend particular churches, to marry a particular kind of spouse, to be law-abiding or criminal, sane or mad, healthy or sick, friendly or suspicious, party animal or wallflower, long- or short-lived, and even, as W. S. Gilbert foretold, "either a little Liberal, or else a little Conservative."

Every school class has a class hero, a class clown, a class swot (or nerd), a class bully, a class victim, and a class athlete. These identities cling. His fellows come to expect certain kinds of behavior from him; he learns to provide or modify them as popularity dictates.

Which brings us to the third element in identity: the influence of environment. In Ira Levin's thriller, *The Boys from Brazil*, Dr. Josef Mengele, contrives the birth of several clones of Hitler, genetically identical to the führer, quite literally "little Hitlers." But even a dedicated Nazi like Mengele recog-

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nizes that blood is not enough. A genetic clone of Hitler, brought up in different circumstances, might become almost anything and anyone: perhaps a terrorist leader, improbably a charismatic benefactor of mankind, very likely a mediocre architect. So he arranges for the adoption of his charges by families that fit the description of Hitler's parents: a middle-aged civil servant married to a younger woman. And he completes the environmental conditioning by having the husbands murdered at the same age as Hitler's father had died.

We are left in suspense at the end of the novel as to how Mengele's plot will turn out; but it seemed to me to contain one obvious flaw. These infant Hitlers were deposited in several countries: capitalist America, social-democratic Sweden, and pre-Thatcher Britain, as well as modern Germany. There must at least be the possibility, perverse from Mengele's standpoint, of Germany's being conquered and forced to adopt a regime of politically-correct social democracy by a ruthless Swedish dictator suffering from an especially neurotic case of cognitive dissonance.

For many of the most important components of identity arise from our being born in a particular family, in a particular place, at a particular time in history, and therefore into a particular set of traditions and customs. To take the most intimate example, the first language we learn is an accident of birth. Our religious identity is something we embrace long before we can grasp its importance or implications. Our sexuality is probably determined in the main genetically, but how we regard it is at least strongly influenced by upbringing and social custom. We pick up the manners of our social class, assuming them to be universal laws of good behavior. We have a natural tendency to emulate our parents, whether they are loving, decent, dutiful people, or selfish, neglectful, and drunken layabouts. We obtain automatic and apparently indefeasible membership in our nation or ethnic group, together with a legacy of accompanying songs, myths, and stories. And all of these things, though external and preexisting, are absorbed by our fledgling identity and become as much a part of us as our temperament, our IQs, or our digestion. Some of the most important elements of our identity are external, accidental, and above all social.

From the point of view of the traditional theory of identity, that poses little or no problem. "Art is man's nature," said Burke, and man is a social animal who draws upon social materials in building his identity. Does this constitute an unnatural imposition by society upon the individual identity? Not at all. Without the influence of society, a person's identity would be like Hobbes's description of natural society: solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short (and, one might add, speechless.) The social elements in identity are the means whereby someone's natural gifts and disposition are made manifest to the rest of the world.

And as we grow older, we also grow increasingly discriminating in the use we make of the social elements of our identity. We reflect upon our condition and circumstances—which is why, incidentally, we cannot be successfully conditioned. We may quietly reject some of the things our parents hold dear. We may change our religion. Or take a more detached view of our country, even changing our citizenship. Or learn a new set of manners, whether as conscious social climbing or simply through frequent exposure to a different class.

As William Letwin wrote in *Policy Review*, reviewing a book by one Professor Green: "'the environment' is not an objective fact which can be assessed accurately by an objective observer. Instead, each individual largely shapes his own environment by emphasizing some of its aspects while ignoring others, by interpreting its manifestations according to his own beliefs, and by directly acting upon it." Or, as Shirley Letwin wrote in *The Anatomy of Thatcherism*: "A human being in possession of his faculties is never merely potter's clay. He is himself both potter and clay because he necessarily decides

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what to make of whatever happens to him."

What, however, is the "person" who does this shaping and choosing? What is the entity that draws upon the different materials in "the environment" and combines them with consciousness, memory, moral sense, and genetic endowment to shape—and perhaps, as time goes by, to reshape—a particular individual identity?

The religious answer to this question is the soul—a soul which is implicated in both the psychological dispositions of identity and the physical movements of the body. Not that the soul controls identity in a manipulative way, as a driver controls a train, but it is at the core of identity. Around it consciousness, memory, genetic endowment, language, nationality, and all the rest form, so to speak, concentric trenches, inhabited by simultaneous translators, theologians, lawyers, strategists, games-players, and, above all, public relations advisers through whom the soul deals with external reality. The result is an identity which, seen from outside, may have many facets, but which is nonetheless built around a central core.

For practical purposes, it makes little difference whether one calls this entity a soul or gives it some secular explanation such as the Freudian trio of id, ego, and superego. What matters is that both describe a central core of identity.

Of course, one cannot demonstrate such an entity, and I am aware that this account contradicts much of the current wisdom of philosophy and psychology. But it is also in accord with a psychological conviction that most people, including even skeptical philosophers, seem to hold intuitively. So, one must ask skeptics some questions: If the psychological reality of identity includes consciousness, memory, moral reasoning, practical and prudential calculation, a feeling of free will and of moral responsibility for the actions of the person (including even those actions which cannot be wholly remembered as, for instance, actions performed when drunk), how does this differ from a soul? And, furthermore, if abandoning the supposed illusion of a soul leads to dangerous practical consequences, as I shall argue, should we not pause to consider those consequences before we throw out the psyche with the psychobabble?

For it is this concept of a natural core of identity that the modern theories of identity reject—and there are a variety of identities nominated to replace the traditional one. They all, however, begin by attempting to discredit the notion of a central core of identity as possessing a reality separate from its experiences. Hume gave classic expression to this skeptical position:

> For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never catch myself at any time without a perception, and never can observe anything but the perception. When my perceptions are removed for any time, as by sound sleep; so long am I insensible of myself, and may truly be said not to exist. . . . I may venture to assert of the rest of mankind, that they are nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity and are in a perpetual flux and movement. . . . The mind is a kind of theatre, where several perceptions successively make their appearance; pass, repass, glide away, and mingle in an infinite variety of postures and situations. There is properly no simplicity in it at one time, nor identity in different; whatever natural propension we may have to imagine that simplicity and identity.

If there is no there there, however, how can we account for the illusion of one? Quite simply, that it is a false identity put there by other people: your parents, your neighbors, your countrymen, and, if you are a child of seven or under, the Jesuits. This false identity consists not only of the digested influences of class, nation, locality, sex, and so on, but also of the moral consciousness we feel to exist at the center of our being. So

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even if there is some kind of instinctual moral sense, as James Q. Wilson argues, the moral rules through which it expresses itself have been put there by other people —respectable society, your parents, the church. For one school of theorists, notably Marxism, liberation consists precisely of freeing yourself from this kind of false consciousness.

According to the more radical philosophers, however, the man who liberates himself from this primitive prison of false identity does not thereby achieve autonomy. No such luck. He stumbles out onto a crowded stage, and he is there handed a variety of masks which he assumes in response to the hints, shouts, murmurs, and prompts from other actors in a play jointly co-authored by Hume and the Italian dramatist Luigi Pirandello. Here is Laudisi, a character in Pirandello's *It Is So If You Think So*, explaining the theory to Signora Sirelli:

> LAUDISI: Now, you have touched me, have you not? And you see me? And you are absolutely sure about me, are you not? Well now, madam, I beg of you; do not tell your husband, nor my sister, nor my niece, nor Signora Cini here, what you think of me; because, if you were to do that, they would all tell you that you are completely wrong. But, you see, you are completely right: because I am really what you take me to be; though, my dear madam, that does not prevent me also being really what your husband, my sister, my niece, and Signora Cini take me to be—because they too are absolutely right!
>
> SIGNORA SIRELLI: In other words you are a different person for each of us.

Here is a world in which identities are created by situations. What holds a personality together really is a set of skills for coping with external reality. Identities are mere roles or masks we use to deal with other people. In which case, of course, our identities are in effect created by others in a much more radical sense than in the theories of Freud or Marx. In the primitive notions of false consciousness, the villains plant their ideas in our heads and then depart, leaving us with our personal neuroses and reactionary social ideas. But in the more radical versions, other people are constantly rewiring the insides of our heads.

These ideas have spread widely in philosophy, sociology, psychology, and dinner-table conversation, so that people as different as psychologist Robert J. Lifton, with his notion of the Protean self, or David Riesman, with his idea of the "other-directed man," may be thought to be expressing variations on them. It is, however, Woody Allen who has produced the reductio ad absurdum of this theory in his film *Zelig*—the story of a man so responsive to the expectations of others and the influences of social environment that he becomes in succession a radical Communist, a Hooverite conservative, an orthodox Jew, and a Nazi. And, of course, he is able to assume these various identities convincingly because he is conscious of an inner emptiness —the lack of an authentic identity of his own.

Here then is the existential choice offered to us by the modern theories of identity: we can be either the puppets of other people, dummies surrounded by ventriloquists, or we can be the landlords of a vacant lot.

This is, of course, an intolerable choice. But it comes accompanied by an attractive escape hatch: if other people can insert a false identity into the empty space in my head, can I perhaps insert an authentic self there in its place? Authentic because it is rationally chosen and consciously shaped by myself rather than being simply a psychological "given" that I gradually discover in childhood and adolescence. And the principle upon which this new identity can be selected is the best bonus of all. That principle has been laid down by the greatest living American psychologist, Tom Wolfe, in his essay "The Me Decade." It began life as an advertising slogan for a shampoo: "If I have only one life to live, let me live it as a

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blonde." The charm of this principle for constructing a new identity is that it is almost infinitely accommodating. It enables us to say to ourselves: If I have only one life to live, let me live it as . . . (fill in the blank)—as a Noble Proletarian, as an Irishman (provided, of course, that I don't start out as Irish), as a woman (if, similarly, I don't happen to be a woman), as a European (from no particular European nation, naturally), or as a proud member of the community of the deaf. (Some of these options will become clearer in due course.)

To the old question, Is there a ghost in the machine? we can now answer: No, but there is a consumer.

The consumer selects his new identity from the vast range of moral possibilities that the modern world throws up. In its simplest form, the new identity is constructed by selecting one facet of someone's real given identity, and elevating it to the whole, or at least to a dominant part, of the personality. George Orwell forecast this process of reification in a 1948 review of Sartre's *Portrait of an Anti-Semite*:

> "The" anti-Semite, he seems to imply all through the book, is always the same kind of a person, recognizable at a glance and, so to speak, in action the whole time. Actually one has only to use a little observation to see that anti-Semitism . . . in any but the worst cases, is intermittent. But [this] would not square with Monsieur Sartre's atomized view of society. There is, he comes near to saying, no such thing as a human being, there are only different categories of men, such as "the" worker, and "the" bourgeois, all classifiable in much the same way as insects.

A recent example of this kind of identity-building is the gay identity. For a gay is not simply a homosexual; he is someone who has made homosexuality the basis of an entire personality and outlook—morals, politics, and social relations. This will tend to make him, or her, hostile to societies traditionally organized to favor heterosexuality and the family, and persuade him to advocate policies that seek not tolerance but the transformation of popular or traditional attitudes toward homosexuality.

Needless to say, this kind of response is by no means universal among homosexuals. Even today when pressures such as "outing" seek to enforce a gay identity on all homosexuals, many of them take the view that homosexuality is just one facet of their identity—whether an advantage, or a curse, or simply a slightly awkward fact about themselves—which has little bearing on the rest of their lives outside the bedroom. Their support for sexual reform will tend to go no further than social tolerance and the repeal of punitive laws. They may find the gay identity mysterious, alien, too narrow to express their entire personality, and even repellent.

Here, in a passage from Noel Coward's diary, is the response of one such homosexual (by no means a repressed one) to the gay milieu of Fire Island in New York:

> I came back last night having spent Saturday and yesterday on Fire Island. I don't think I shall ever go again. It is lovely from the point of view of beach and sun and wearing no clothes, but the atmosphere is sick-sick-sick. Never in my life have I seen such concentrated abandoned homosexuality. It is fantastic and difficult to believe. I wished really that I hadn't gone. Thousands of queer young men of all shapes and sizes camping about blatantly and carrying on—in my opinion—appallingly. Then there were all the lesbians glowering at each other. Among this welter of brazen perversion wander a few "straights," with children and dogs. I have always been of the opinion that a large group of queer men was unattractive. On Fire Island it is more than unattractive, it's macabre, sinister, irritating, and somehow tragic.

Self-conscious identity-building is very different from the earlier argument of Bill and Shirley Letwin that traditional identity can be modified by reason's deciding to emphasize some aspects of one's environment

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at the expense of others. The difference is subtle but important and it has immense consequences. It is the difference between piecemeal self-improvement and the wholesale reconstruction of the personality. Someone attempting piecemeal reform will usually refer to what he is doing in modest terms—"I'm trying to be more punctual." Someone engaged in ideological reconstruction of himself will, appropriately enough, see it in dramatic, even religious terms, as becoming a different sort of human being. He will be re-making himself in accordance with some revelation, either some new principle of reason outside himself, or some inner prompting of the personality, or even both—some impulse extracted from inside himself and expanded into a universal truth about human nature. Thus a lesbian, uncomfortable with femininity, will eventually be struck by the blinding revelation that all gender roles are socially constructed.

Such illumination is not confined to the Left. An example of this kind of self-conscious identity politics on the political Right is the ideological definition of American nationality—the claim that America is unlike other nations in that its nationality is neither ethnic nor cultural, but consists of embracing the principles of liberty and equality set out in the Declaration of Independence and embodied in the Constitution. To be sure, there is an ideological component in American nationality which the Declaration in particular dramatizes. (That is not, of course, unique to America; all nations which have played a part in world history as well as their own, notably the French, have furnished such ideological explanations of themselves.) But that ideology, important though it is, is merely the conscious political expression of a much more extensive national culture which is the result of a common language, history, institutions, and, overall, the shared experience of living together in the same territory.

An episode in the Second World War is instructive here. During the Battle of the Bulge, German commandos were roaming around in American uniforms, and GIs seeking to establish the true identity of other soldiers asked questions to test their Americanism. Did they ask their view of equality or rights of popular government? Of course not; mere ideas of that kind could be parroted—indeed, genuinely believed—by non-Americans. No, they asked them details of American life in the broadest cultural context—the winner of the previous World Series, radio advertising jingles, the capital of their home state, Mae West's bust measurement. In short, the kinds of things that every American would know—but that a foreigner could not easily study. In his book *The Blood-Dimmed Tide*, Gerald Astor describes how two Allied generals coped:

> General Omar Bradley said: "Three times I was ordered to prove my identity by cautious GIs. The first time by identifying Springfield as the capital of Illinois (my questioner held out for Chicago); the second time by locating the guard between the center and tackle on a line of scrimmage; the third time by naming the then-current spouse of a blonde called Betty Grable. Grable stopped me (the correct answer was bandleader Harry James) but the sentry did not. Pleased at having stopped me he . . . passed me on."
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> General Montgomery . . . imperiously directed his driver to ignore the sentry. The guard shot out the tires of his car and held the British commander for several hours. When he heard of the incident, Eisenhower enjoyed one of his few laughs during the Bulge.

In short, what shapes Americans and American national identity is the richness of the entire culture, not merely its conscious political expression.

But cannot someone become an American? And if so, does that not establish the validity of the idea of American national identity as something to be chosen rather than merely accepted? That is certainly the view inherent in America's civic religion of itself and regularly intoned by judges who, when

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swearing in new U.S. citizens, assure them that they are every bit as American as the descendants of the Pilgrim Fathers. It is, however, a pious fallacy. A new U.S. citizen may have as many legal rights as a native-born American, but he has not been as shaped by the American experience. And if he has really become an American out of sympathy for liberal principles, then his American identity ought to wax and wane in response to the course both of American history and of his own convictions. Suppose that America fails to live up to his political views? Or that he changes those views? Very likely a consistent philosopher would be feeling twinges of disloyalty at the end of the first week.

A truer version of becoming an American would be that it is a process that is only perceived in retrospect. A foreign resident who has married an American, brought up American children, lived an American life in all the everyday respects from school to supermarket, and worried through the nation's crises, will one day wake up to find that he has become an American. He will find himself unselfconsciously using the pronoun "we" when referring to Americans. No decision was necessary; no decision could have worked this transformation. Becoming an American is the same process for an immigrant as for a native-born child: living in America. U.S. citizenship is merely a legal ratification of this psychological evolution.

Once identity becomes a matter of choice or conscious decision, however, a Rubicon has been crossed. For there are more radical ways of creating a new identity, whether sexual or national, than by overemphasizing a facet of one's given identity or by accommodating oneself to some external vision. One can adopt another's identity entirely. Thus transvestism is a half-way house of sexual identity politics; but transsexualism is the more radical assertion that one can choose not merely to ape another sexual identity, but even to embrace it in the fullest sense. This is a delusion, of course, since men who have transformed themselves into make-believe women are not genetically female and cannot perform central female roles such as, for instance, giving birth. Nonetheless, taking this delusion to its logical extent, Shulamith Firestone, a radical feminist, has advocated genetic engineering to allow men and women to choose which sexual role—impregnation or childbearing—they wish to undertake. In reality, this would amount to the deliberate creation of freaks. But it signifies that even nature is no longer seen as a constraint upon identity because literally nothing is impossible for someone determined to become his own creator.

Given the spirit of the age, we could hardly expect such metaphysical ventures to be left to individual enterprise. And indeed American bureaucrats and the Ford Foundation have created an entire *ethnic* identity by a stroke of the pen. In 1973, in order to establish a rational structure for affirmative action quotas, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) promulgated Statistical Directive Number 13, as Michael Lind describes in *The Next American Nation*, dividing Americans into five ethnic groups, of which the most creative concoction is Hispanic. Now, Hispanics are not a national group; they include Cubans, Mexicans, Columbians, Chileans, even Spaniards. Nor are they a racial category—since they cover whites, blacks, and Amerindians. Nor—and this is a surprise—are they even a linguistic category, because they include people with Spanish surnames from families which have not spoken Spanish for generations, or as in the case of some Mexican Amerindians, from families which have never spoken Spanish at any time in history.

But since being Hispanic has certain practical advantages—for instance, being the beneficiary of the quota spoils system, or receiving money from the Ford Foundation to advance Hispanic interests—there are now a considerable number of Americans, generally in academia but not exclusively so, who think of themselves as possessing this Hispanic identity. Indeed, as

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Linda Chavez pointed out, it is quite difficult for anyone with a Spanish surname to escape being educated in Spanish in the public schools, even if they cannot speak the language. The bureaucrats insist that they must be brought up, for the sake of their authentic identity, in their own culture—even though it is *not* their culture and, indeed, insofar as it is a hybrid-Hispanic culture, may not be anyone's culture, except possibility that of a Clinton cabinet appointee.

Can we see any common elements uniting these proliferating invented identities? Let me suggest three: first, they are stark and impoverished compared to "given" identities; second, they are self-conscious and precarious; and third as Kenneth Minogue has pointed out, they are the adversaries of traditional identities.

It goes almost without saying that an identity built upon one facet of a personality will be impoverished alongside the richness of an identity that reflects the full range of influences upon a life. The Marxist categories of proletarian and bourgeois are useless except as economic categories. An identity based upon the fact that you work for wages and are alienated from the product of your labor is no identity at all. If a young Marxist intellectual were to ask for advice on how to live a good proletarian life, what advice would we give him? It would almost certainly not include, say, the breeding of racing pigeons, or buying a garden allotment, though both are important components of a genuine working-class life in Northern England.

Compare, on the other hand, the richness of traditional social identities like that, for instance, of "the gentleman." As Shirley Letwin demonstrates in her book *The Gentlemen in Trollope*, this is a subject yielding not only sharp and subtle social observations (and satires), but also a rich vein of moral criticism. One might say, in relation to our topic, that the gentleman in Letwin is the highest example of moral reason operating piecemeal to improve the personality from the material within it. False social identities, which tend to reconstruct the personality in accord with some ideal, inevitably produce a one-dimensional man—the Soviet proletarian, for instance, an examination of whose moral character can sustain nothing more complex than a cartoon or a socialist-realist painting (which is hard to distinguish from a cartoon).

Second, in addition to being thin, invented identities are also extremely precarious. The more natural our identity is, the more we take it for granted. Self-consciousness is the constant companion of uncertainty. We are self-conscious on entering the room at someone else's party, conscious of other people's needs and enjoyment when we give a party at home. A good example of self-consciousness as the attribute of an uncertain identity occurs in Thomas Mann's *Felix Krull*. Krull, the hero, is travelling in a comfortable first-class train compartment, for all intents and purposes a young aristocrat. As a train attendant is leaving his compartment, Krull smiles at him—a smile, he says, "that assuredly confirmed him in his conservative principles to the point where he would gladly have fought and died for them." The point, however is that Krull is not a young aristocrat; he is a confidence trickster. It is extremely doubtful that a real aristocrat would react in this way. He would simply be less conscious of his impact—flaunting his identity only when expected marks of deference were not paid to him. But the confidence man has to calculate such effects with precision, because his hold on an aristocratic identity is extremely precarious.

Hence the phenomenon of the marginal patriot—the outsider who seeks to demonstrate his commitment to, say, a national identity by being more nationalistic than thou. John Stephenson, a Paddington-born man of uncertain ancestry, thus became Sean MacStiofain, the chief of staff of the IRA in the 1970s. MacStiofain succeeded heroically, or rather anti-heroically, in his identity as an Irish patriot, going so far as to launch a hunger strike. Near death, how-

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ever, he gave up the strike, at which point his IRA colleagues suddenly realized he had been an Englishman all along. His Irish identity had always been precarious; it depended upon his performing heroic feats.

Another instance is the eagerness with which many homosexuals greet any scientific work that suggests that homosexuality may be rooted in the genes. In theory, they need not worry about the tyranny of nature in relation to sexual identity. "Queer theory," like feminist theory, is supposed to have established that gender is socially constructed. Yet they give an almost desperate endorsement to the authority of science and nature when that seems likely to support the naturalness and thus inevitability of the identity that appeals to them.

Third—and most significant—the invented identity is both parasitic and adversarial with respect to the real thing. An invented identity, as we saw above, will model itself on an existing one. Homosexual families mimic traditional families by copying the parental role and demanding such perquisites as pension rights for domestic partners. But they are unable to perform important aspects of the role, such as childbearing, and they are often unwilling to accept its disciplines, such as sexual fidelity. Invented national identities similarly copy the outward shell of real nations. For instance the European Union is gradually acquiring a flag, an anthem, citizenship, and even an army without the prior substance of a single European people with a sense of community and allegiance.

But although they may be fraudulent, these imitations of identity naturally weaken the real identities, whether of family or of nation, by sucking the significance out of the customs and practices that traditionally bolster them. If, for instance, unofficial and transient relationships have their financial arrangements underpinned by the state, then the family derives no special significance from the fact that its own arrangements are similarly protected.

But the hostility of the invented identity goes beyond this parasitism. As Kenneth Minogue has pointed out in *Alien Powers*, the first impulse of someone who has thrown off his old identity and embraced a new one is an evangelical impulse. He wants to tell everyone that once he was blind, that now he sees, but that they are still blind. And what he sees is that his old identity was a fraud and an imposition, and that their current identity still is. Hence, new identities tend to attack and seek to replace their counterparts among existing identities. The gay or feminist identity will define itself by opposition to the traditional sexual identities of male and female. These it will decry as socially constructed and consequently false and oppressive—"Heterosexism" in the approved jargon.

In the case of national identities, the rivalry between ideological nationalisms—analyzed with such devastating irony by Elie Kedourie in his classic book *Nationalism*—and taken-for-granted, hand-me-down ethnocultural nationalisms can be especially vicious. For pre-existing loyalties are generally an obstacle to the new national identity that is striving to be born. And since ideological nationalists act upon Charles Stewart Parnell's principle that "no man has the right to fix the boundary of the march of a nation," the opposition may legitimately face extirpation. Sometimes, literally so—real people and real peoples were murdered in the campaign to create a new Soviet man.

At other times, ideological nationalism leads to polemics and the slow erosion of former loyalties rather than to Golgotha. Thus the Canadian nationalist identity—the officially fostered bilingual one, manufactured in Ottawa—defines itself by a hostility to the actual nationalisms of Quebec and English Canada, particularly the latter since it is the nationalism of the majority. It is also markedly hostile to the seductive English-speaking American identity next door; the first claim of a Canadian nationalist is that he is "not American." Similarly, the Euro-nationalism of Brussels is constantly engaged in polemics against its rivals, the traditional patriotisms of France,

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Britain, and other European countries which it blames for past wars, racism, and all the fashionable vices.

And in the United States, the theory that America is a nation of immigrants held together only by allegiance to liberal political ideas is in a state of constant tension with the actual American historical identity. For it implies that America is the whole world in microcosm, that everyone is in principle an American, and that therefore America's actual English-speaking culture is merely the property of an ethnic group or a temporary majority and does not deserve to be "privileged" as the culture of the whole society. (That America's liberal constitutionalism has grown in this soil and might wither in any other is a problem that is only now forcing itself on our attention.) Hence, this deracinated philosophical Americanism is now the carrier of multiculturalism which holds that America is indeed a constitutional umbrella of liberal political ideas, but one sheltering not individuals but the ethnocultural identities of Anglos, Hispanics, blacks, etc. Ideological Americanism thereby helps to deconstruct America in the most literal sense by making it a loose federation of cultural identities. The parable of the Tower of Babel might have been invented to describe this progress from hubris to incoherence.

What does all this matter? One might suppose that a theory holding that identity is infinitely plastic—a succession of masks chosen in response to the applause of others as much as for the satisfaction of one's (hypothetical) self—would tend to social peace. After all, have not conflicts until now been clashes between the hard and supposedly unyielding identities of nation, class, and ethnicity? Surely a widespread acceptance of the malleability of identity would lead to a tolerance of other identities as equally valid (or bogus) as one's own. Perhaps it would even lead to the construction of a supra-identity of tolerance within which all these identity sub-cultures could comfortably co-exist—a kind of Austria-Hungary of moral visions in which the ruling power demands only the mildest of allegiances, one easily compatible with the identity's integrity. Alas, it does not seem to be working out that way. Social conflict between different groups seems to be multiplying in lockstep with the increased popularity of the theory of malleable identity.

And we can imagine why. There are more identities around, to begin with. A plastic identity is, in principle, arbitrary and limitless. There is literally no group, however arbitrarily selected, which cannot conceive of itself as possessing one and thus forming a particular "community." Indeed, the number of groups which claim some such basis for affiliation are multiplying rapidly. The late Aaron Wildavsky once calculated, tongue in cheek, that groups of this kind (including women, blacks, Eskimos, Hispanics and the disabled) added up to more than three-hundred percent of the American people.

Even the process of expansion can sometimes provoke conflict when some members of the group have no wish to share in the proferred identity, and the group as a whole seeks to bring them into line. The outing of private homosexuals by gay activists is just such a conflict which arises when identity is as much a cause as a given fact. Still more extravagant, some ideologues have argued that the deaf are a self-conscious community with their own language, culture, and identity. Spokesmen for their organization—the National Association for the Deaf—have at times denounced attempts to enable the deaf to hear as cultural genocide. They have even lobbied the Federal government to prevent parents of deaf children from relieving their deafness through an operation that surgically installs a hearing device in a child's head and allows him to develop normal hearing and speech skills. (I should, in all honesty, add that the chairman of the study group that made this recommendation is not himself deaf.)

More significantly, identity is not just how we feel about ourselves; to be truly

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satisfying, our identity needs to be recognized by others. Yet imagine how difficult it must be for some of the groups now in existence to be treated as possessing true identities by the rest of society. For instance, there is the S&M community which meets in various clubs with names such as The Dungeon. This is a group of sadists and masochists who, according to a 1994 article in *New York* magazine, formed the Eulenspiegel Society, a "masochists' rights" group in 1971. Sadists were admitted later—doubtless the first expression of the masochists' rights the organization exists to protect. In an absolutely wonderful paradox, they complain that they are oppressed by society because they are forced to conceal their lifestyles.

Such forms of identity politics promise long-running cultural wars. There is little prospect that most people, even those privately attracted to these sexual practices, will ever be prepared to grant any sort of respectable social status, let alone official standing, to the Eulenspiegel Society and similar groups. But these groups will continue to push for recognition, legal and otherwise. An organization of pedophiles did manage to get itself recognized, first, as a non-governmental organization by the United Nations through its membership in a larger gay coalition, and subsequently as a tax-exempt educational group in its own right. These caused political rows, and its UN accreditation was later withdrawn. But we may expect the demand for recognition by this and similar groups to be renewed.

And when the demand is resisted, or even when it is conceded without enthusiasm, the disappointed group will seek to force a deeper acceptance from others. As the philosopher John Gray has pointed out, tolerance is no longer enough for such groups because it implies that the thing tolerated merits disapproval. And disapproval will seem especially insulting when a question of identity is at stake. If a practice someone performs or a belief he holds excites disapproval, he may be wounded or privately bitter. If his very identity excites disapproval, then he will become outraged and demand a more substantive surrender by his critics, perhaps even the repression of their objections ("hate speech"). In this context, you might say that the pedophiles want to make us cry uncle. They are a long way from success as yet. But the larger gay community has been quite successful in transforming the moral disapproval of its critics into a medical-cum-psychological disorder called "homophobia," the main symptom of which is being accused of it.

What maximizes the likelihood of conflict is that this very refusal to extend approval may be implicit in some other identity. For instance, not even the most multicultural feminist can extend tolerance, let alone approval, to an Islamic identity because of its narrow concept of women's education. Similarly, the Afrocentrist or Hispanic activist is likely to reject the political arrangements and electoral boundaries based upon a nonracial or monocultural concept of American identity and demand forms of political representation which treat ethnic groups as the building blocks of political society. Hence, the emergence of legal theories, in the writings of Lani Guinier and others, that would revive "fancy franchises" and "concurrent majorities" on the underlying assumption that minorities and majorities are not continually forming and reforming on different issues, but permanently frozen along ethnic and racial lines. Hence, in numberless ways, the multiplication of chosen identities leads to endless social conflict.

When modern psychologists and modernist writers began deconstructing what they thought was the prison of a rigid and unreflecting identity, they doubtless thought they were liberating the citizens to stroll about in free and equal relationships without bumping into the barriers of race, gender, ethnicity, and class. What they were in fact doing was laying the epistemological ground for a low-intensity civil war.

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The multicultural Muse

by John Simon

The camera only photographs the photographer, runs a line by John Ciardi, perhaps his only good one. Or so my faulty memory recalls it. Similarly, an anthology photographs the anthologist. *The Best American Poetry* was edited this year by Adrienne Rich; to help convey its contents, I must advert to the poet who chose them.[1]

Back in 1951, I was one of three assistants in Archibald MacLeish's poetry course at Harvard, and a student named Adrienne Rich came to me with an acrimonious complaint. W. H. Auden had just chosen her Yale Younger Poet of the year, yet MacLeish was not paying special attention to her. She had hoped for advanced, personalized treatment, and here she was being denied privileged status. I tried to remonstrate gently, but the Yale Younger Poet-elect indignantly dropped the course.

Later that year, Miss Rich gave a poetry reading in Harvard Hall. Knowing my skepticism about this reading, Dean Wilma Kerby-Miller of Radcliffe, a charming woman, asked me as we were leaving for my opinion. "To appreciate it fully," I replied, "one would need the combined attributes of a Homer and a Beethoven, namely blindness and deafness." Nothing about Miss Rich's subsequent career has induced me to change my position. In fact, I consider Randall Jarrell's essay that enshrined Miss Rich the great poetry critic's sole blind (and deaf) spot.

Miss Rich's biography is as curious as her bibliography. After Radcliffe, while still leading a heterosexual life, she married. Her husband committed suicide. Recognizing her true vocation, she became a lesbian feminist, refusing for a time to talk to, or have anything to do with, men. I have spoken to persons involved in booking her as a reader or a speaker, and they had choice horror stories to tell. That, of course, does not preclude the writing of good poetry. David Lehman, the series editor of *The Best American Poetry*, says in his 1996 foreward that Rich's own work leans on the tradition of Bertolt Brecht, Pablo Neruda, and Muriel Rukeyser. The first two were dreadful human beings, but good poets; the third was a good human being, but a poor poet. Goodness, as Mae West, who was neither a good poet nor a good human being, observed, has nothing to do with it. But politics does, as the selections in the Rich anthology richly demonstrate.

Of the seventy-two poets included, thirty-eight are women, which may or may not mark a sisterly predilection. Many contributions are from blacks, Hispanics, Indians, Chinese Americans, Japanese Americans, Hawaiians, and prison inmates; they are multicultural and often countercultural. There are also poems by South Africans and Canadians, which I find surprising. We get

1 *The Best American Poetry 1996*, edited by Adrienne Rich, with a foreword by the series editor, David Lehman; Scribner, 318 pages, $27.50; $13 paper.

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the stipulated seventy-five poems, with three or four poets granted two entries. So multicultural is our anthologist that, she says in her introduction, she looked "for poems with a core (as in *corazón*)." She also wanted "poems good enough to eat, to crunch between the teeth, to feel their juices bursting under the tongue, unmicrowaveble poems." I am not sure why poems so palpably comestible would be unmicrowavable, but it may be that slow heating in a saucepan is more conducive to a poem's juiciness.

Rich's other aim was to counteract the white majority among published poets, a "racialization" that is "a system of social and demographic power relations [which] the de facto apartheid of our institutionalized literary culture reflects." Miss Rich will counteract this apartheid of the imagination, which results in a "blockage, a kind of deflection, in poetry," and as proof of her stand, she quotes from Audre Lord and Toni Morrison, then goes on: "We need poetry as a living language . . . still spoken, aloud or in the mind, muttered in secret, subversive, reaching around corners, crumpled into a pocket, performed to a community, read aloud to the dying, recited by heart, scratched or sprayed on a wall." That is a lot to ask from something also crunchingly good enough to eat, but not impossible. Anything can be sprayed on a wall.

The editor is proud to include three poets of high-school age, and to discover in the prescribed alphabetical order unexpected parallels, emergent cross references—as if any two lines written or drawn on a piece of paper could not set up free associations. "We lack a vocabulary for thinking about pain," she writes, "as communal and public," or as deriving from our "skewed social relationships." This is puzzling: our English vocabulary has managed to deal with everything; it is just that in other ages and anthologies the emphasis lay elsewhere, whether out of modesty and decorum or purblindness and self-indulgence remains debatable. But even then there were the Whitmaniacs and Sandburgers who foresightedly met Rich's requirements.

Defiantly, Miss Rich proclaims, "The poems in this anthology are, in one way or another, victories, because they don't flinch at the materials and they don't stop at the personal." By this definition, some of the finest poetry would advocate coprophagy for all with highly accessible grunts and yelps. Luckily, Miss Rich's practice is better than her preaching, but only just.

Now if Miss Rich tells us where she stands on poetry, so must her reviewer declare himself. Poetry, as I see it, may well be the most prodigious art because it is ambidextrous; only opera and art song can make similar claims, though a bit less powerfully. Painting, for example, is for the eye; prose, for the eye or, when read aloud, somewhat uneasily for the ear. But poetry must be music for the ear and imagery for the eye in a dead, but vibrantly alive, heat. Anything else is ineptitude, abrogation, masquerade. Which is not to deny that prose can be poetic, but that is another ballgame.

As for opera and the *lied* or *mélodie*: they do, of course, perform a dual job. But they do so by pressing separate art forms together, with one, music, inevitably on top, even when a great poet wrote the text —think of Heine or Hofmannsthal, Auden or Baudelaire. And observe how often the greatest operas and art songs are settings for mediocre verbiage. It is the difference between the humdrum launching pad and the rocket to the stars.

Poetry began as a chant, then purified itself by developing its own internal music. For the Greeks, this was metrics. Meter, to be sure, was only regulated rhythm, but, like a composition for percussion alone, it was a kind of music. Subsequently, alliteration, assonance, and rhyme were added. And all along, the melody of language was exploited by such poets as had ears. For English speakers, the groundwork was laid by Chaucer, Skelton, Wyatt, Surrey, and Spenser. And then there was Shakespeare.

In the nineteenth century, alas, free verse

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was invented. Note how poor were its precursors *qua* free-verse writers. "Lycidas," perhaps; but surely not Macpherson. Kit Smart, I suppose, but more for the man than the poet. Who would not give all Blake's prophetic books for one song of either innocence or experience? Hopkins may be an exception—what the later Joyce was for prose. The others are diluters, whether called Arnold or Eliot, Whitman or Pound, Lawrence or Williams. That is, insofar as they wrote free verse. But there is something more. The best free verse cannot quite shake off a meterish rhythm and other musical devices. Poetry can sneak in by the back door, but only by a privileged one.

And so, in our time, history repeats itself. Rhyme went, then meter went, and we were left holding loose, baggy monsters. Weird, unnatural line breaks, and gaping blank spaces between words seem to me no substitutes. Neither are shaped poems or other typographical games. In *The Best American Poetry 1996* there is virtually no rhyme. W. S. Merwin uses it parodistically; a very, very few others will dip into what is usually called slant or half rhyme, or here, more likely, quarter rhyme.

Let me start with one of the shortest pieces, by one of the best-known poets: "body," by the late James Merrill, which, as it happens, does rhyme:

> Look closely at the letters. Can you see,
> entering (stage left), then floating full,
> then heading off—so soon—how like
> a little kohl-rimmed moon
> *o* plots her course from *b* to *d*
>
> —as *y*, unanswered, knocks at the stage door?
> Looked at too long, words fail,
> phase out. Ask, now that *body* shines
> no longer, by what light you learn these lines
> and what the *b* and *d* stood for.

Yes, rhyme is still there, but what of meter? There is an underlying iambic tetrameter, but lines two, five, and eight barely comply; lines three and six, not at all. This leaves four genuinely metrical verses out of nine.

What about the imagery? Merrill, doubtless aware of his aging, uses the shortness and transitoriness of the printed word *body* to convey the brevity and transience of life. Good, but he can't quite make it click. The initial tropes establish *body* as an actor onstage: entrance (stage right), deportment (floating full), make-up (kohl-rimmed). But then the imagery collapses. Why "moon" rather than "eye"? And how can *y* knock unanswered on the stage door, which means it is locked out, and cannot appear at all? True, "bod," as in "What a great bod!" is slangily with us, but that falls outside Merrill's purview.

With line six, the stage metaphor is dropped altogether, undercutting the efficacy of a short poem demanding cohesion, unity. The imagery now shifts to vision, eyesight, light by which you can read, and dark by which you cannot. The jolt is big and damaging. Yet even on its own, this trope limps badly. Yes, "body" is, like any other word, quickly gone. But how does this imply that it had an intrinsic light to read by? Why isn't the lamp, more appropriately, "mind"? And why is the loss of *b* and *d* more lamentable than that of *o* and *y*? A compelling poem clicks into place: *this* is what it must sound like and evoke (let us avoid the controversial "mean"), though it may well have further reverberant associations. A true poem may begin in willfulness, but must end in necessity.

Let me turn to one of those three youngest poets, the only one of three or four of any age to rate twofold inclusion. Natasha Le Bel, a Brooklynite, has studied art here and abroad, exhibited in Pont-Aven, won sundry high-school awards, and is Yale '98. Both chosen poems were written in her senior year in high school. "Boxing the Female," the poet tells us, is based on her charcoal drawing of a huge, awkward, beautiful woman pressing against the edges of the paper, and represents the poet in the process of "constantly tumbling" toward "becoming herself."

The tumble begins: "I saw myself inside

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again I saw/ myself inside a box/ which had no bottom, front/ nor face only/ sides, four, closing/ in at right angles and me/ crouching low within the dark/ interior." Later in the poem, we read about "feminine geometry," which this must be: the box had no bottom, front, nor [for "or," which may be feminine grammar] face, i.e. lacks three sides, yet has four sides left to close in on the poet. But she mentions also her "passionate claustrophobia," which may account for her miscounting. A bit later, "I began and I/ begin/ coming out of myself again I am/ coming into my form/ my born body new and/ gravid with musical sensuality." Too bad some of that musical sensuality did not spill over into her verse.

But emergence is hard for "the blooming/ human pattern of my chemistry/ through pouring rocks of ferocious/ silence/ that you impose," the pouring rock imposer presumably the poem's dedicatee, whom Miss Le Bel describes in her note as "the man with whom I share my space and thoughts." "Space," I assume, refers to her apartment rather than to the inside of her head. A noisy place, though; her second poem, "Foot Fire Burn Dance," begins, "I do the black boot stomp/ on my stucco ceiling," a stomp that evolves into a "bang" then a "thud," and ends with "fire in my feet/ beating and burning and/ thudding and churning music/ out of my soles." It is comforting for a poem lacking metrical feet to have at least thudding ones.

The longest poem here, "Ghost Sickness," by Louis Alberto Urrea, in thirteen parts, is seventeen pages long. Urrea, forty-one, the son of a Mexican father, is a full-time writer who once taught writing workshops at Harvard, and is now working on "a long novel about his great aunt, Teresa Urrea, the Saint of Cabora." "Ghost Sickness," which took decades to write, is about his father leaving him alone in the Mexican sticks to make him a man, about paratyphoid hallucinations, about a whorehouse visit, about a twenty-seven-hour bus trip back to the States and further hospitalization. It practices what most of these poems do, bizarre line breaks; also passages in Spanish, a whole section printed as prose, passages in italics (the father talking), some passages double-spaced (reason unclear). Also single words flung wildly across the page, e.g., "intricate" broken into three lines, but without hyphens.

Section eight, in its entirety, runs "My father pale as a fingernail/ drives demonic/ across ghost-heavy night." The refrain "love is all you need" pops up all over the place. Some images work: "On a highway shoulder, cows/ upturned: 4 legs stiff/ as furniture. Upholstery gutted/ by obsidian vultures." Others don't: in the brothel, "Kneeling drunks/ knelt at the bowls, penitent supplicants/ to the Virgin of Filth." As in many poems here, there are endless lists: the prostitutes "slept/ with washtubs, t.v.'s, candy, photos,/ images,/ cigarettes, magazines, radios, memories, dreams,/ chamber pots, underpants, razor blades, make-up,/ bottles, babies, nightmares, and one bundle each/ of rubber-band letters."

One of the leading list-makers is Raymond Patterson, who taught English at City College for years, and who, in section three of "Harlem Suite," is walking along 125th Street. "Above the mother tongues of Wolof, Harlemese, Igbo, Creole, Gullah, Rasta Patwa, Urdu, Spanglish, Cochin, Arabic, Cantonese,/ above the drum of hiphop, gospel, reggae, rumba, highlife, blues, and gangsta rap,/ above the shouts of Malcolm, Marcus, Martin, Adam, Winnie, Nina, Sharpton, Farrakhan," and four other anaphoric "above the"s, the poet hears the cry of "No justice. No peace" and concludes with the whopping cliché: "From that cage of fire/ such beauty springs,/ as takes the breath away."

The Indian poet Marie Annharte Baker does not like the edited version of her "Porkskin Panorama" in *Callaloo* as much as the unself-censored one in her chapbook *Coyote Columbus Café* or, better yet, the one she does as a performance piece, "where I actually grab a bullwhip out of my suitcase (labeled INDIAN BAG) and pace on the stage

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as a dominatrix." The long poem ends, "I wrestle pull & jerk the slot/ slut machine, word slut I become/ to get the proper feel/ Indian Country of the 1990's wanna bet/ another winner another gamble"—no period. But you will note the ampersand, madly popular with our poets, as is also the slash, sometimes dropped into the middle of a word.

Take the opening of a long poem, "All (Facts, Stories, Chance)" by the black poet C. S. Giscombe, a professor of English at Illinois State, and note that slash in line six:

> I'm at no center, big & slack as I am
> in my evil nature, in the whole blue funk,
> in this for thee & myself—
> but source, the argument goes, *gives*
> denotation,
> even our having fanned out can't keep the
> nomenclature from overtaking us
> (at which point/s it finds its own level,
> suggests the argument)

and so on, without conveying any meaning, any more than does the lengthy explicatory note (some poets go on for pages!).

Then, again, there is the Chinese-Hawaiian Carolyn Lei-Lanilau, whose "Koloke or Communication" contains many Hawaiian words explained in her glossary, and stuff such as

> In church, my father and I pray Catholic.
> Chinese grandma snickering loudly pagan.
> With my sister and Hawaiian grandma, I pulse
> *'aumakua*
>
> To be my body, I solve my head into two
> cylinders
> stretching the sky to my stomach. There,
> white columns finish a toilet that
> flushes energy somewhere else.

'Aumakua is glossed as "family or personal guardian spirit, often taking the form of an animal." But what are we to make of that "pulse" or that "solve"? And just where is the *there* of that toilet?

Alice Notley went from being married to Ted Berrigan, the Village and Lower East Side poet, to living in Paris and being married to the British poet Douglas Oliver (unknown to me), and, en route, wrote more than twenty books of verse, including a book-length poem just published by Viking Penguin. In "One of the Longest Times," she writes, "This rock's me from before the flood and after the fire/ This rock's you and what happens to you it adds up to/ This rock this time and/ This time in the bush is long, long/ Becky's our baby sister and this one/ Is hers from before the flood/ And after this fire that comes/ I am a rock in these shadows who/ Am I speaking to who am I speaking." Thus echolalia is mistaken for incantation; and even if the subject seems to be a childhood memory, must the poem itself be prattle?

Here now is Stanley Plumpp, professor of English and African-American Studies at the University of Illinois at Chicago. This is part of a longish poem that also contains the verb form "bidded," which isn't English but may be African-American:

> I/be dog
> gone/if your dance
> ain't a gathering/place
> Where/you spray
> paint/the sky.
>
> Say.
>
> I/sell
> blues/to its walking
> shoes.

And so on and on. You will observe that the odd line breaks are not enough for Plumpp; he also plumps for slashes. The monosyllable *Say* appears by itself as a separate strophe three times. The poem from which this comes is about Keorapatse Kgositsile, a "major South African poet," whose wife is Cheryl Harris, a professor of law at Kent College in Chicago. It seems that "considerable bounce came into his steps with his marriage . . . and the birth of his son

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Thebe Neruda." Perhaps it is that bounce that those jazzy slashes and hiphop line breaks replicate.

Katherine Alice Power is famous, though not as a poet, but as a participant in a 1970 Boston bank robbery in which a beloved policeman was killed. After twenty-three productive years under an alias in Oregon, she gave herself up, and is serving an eight-to-twelve-year sentence in Boston, which "prohibits her from profiting from any work related to her crime or her years in hiding." Her poem, a sestina to her son Jaime, is uninteresting, but her note on it contains a magnificent statement: she will not accept money for her writing because she is unwilling to censor from her work "references to such events as the Vietnam War, such acts as committing crimes for political purposes, or such ideas as the powerful necessity of nonviolence." Cop-killing bank robbery and the powerful necessity of nonviolence—here is a paradox worthy of a better poet than Miss Power—Góngora, perhaps.

In "Domingo Limón," Alberto Alvaro Ríos, Regents' Professor at Arizona State University, recalls a childhood friend who grew a goatee and died young:

> When he smiled with his teeth
> It was the beginning of the voyage each time,
> His teeth like ivory thumbs
>
> Hitch-hiking themselves toward some
> adventure,
> His teeth the many tusks
> from off a single elephant
>
> Who would not be stopped,
> Who came back to the two holes of
> the gun,
> The two holes of his own nostrils,
>
> Because how else does a rudder lead
> but straight,
> And what a good song of a rudder
> That hair below his lip was

And so on.

I ask: why write a longish poem in triplets if they have nothing cohesive or self-contained about them, are not in any way relating stanza form to expressiveness? And does Professor Ríos think that mixing metaphors like pigments on a palette creates a valid new image? His tooth trope jumps from voyage to thumbs of a hitchhiker to ivory of an elephant to double barrel of a gun that cannot stop him to nostrils to a rudder that sings as it leads to the goatee. A traveling trope if ever there was one, more unstoppable than a rogue elephant.

Pattiann Rogers's "Abundance and Satisfaction" is sensitive-poetess poesy at not quite its worst, but close. It begins: "One butterfly is not enough. We need/ many thousands of them, if only/ for the effusion of the wayward-/ swaying words they occasion," and so on, effusing wayward-swayingly. Comes the palinode: "But thousands of butterflies/ are surfeit," and so forth. It seems that to study just one butterfly adequately "would require at least/ a millennium of attention to all melody,/ phrase, gravity and horizon."

In part two, Miss Rogers agonizes over whether we need one moon or many: "We need a new language/ of moons containing all the syllables/ of interacting rocks and light," etc. Part three begins, "And of gods, we need just one, one/ for the grief of the twenty snow geese/ frozen by their feet in ice and dead/ above winter water. Yet we need twenty-/ times-twenty gods for all the recurring/ memories of twenty snow geese frozen/ by their feet in sharp lake-water ice."

A characteristic political poem here comes from David Shapiro, who has published many volumes of poetry, art criticism, and translation, and won many fellowships, prizes, and grants. He has taught all over the place, and writes the most spectacularly pretentious and pedantic explication of his poem, "For the Evening Land," whose title, as he points out, is an Anglo-German pun. He adduces a number of painters—to one of whom, Gregory Botts, the poem is an homage—also Harold Bloom, a Hebrew pun on Adam, his own mother, Fraida

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Chagy, "who had a wild love of justice and profound hate of racism and anti-Semitism," and thus becomes the poem's dedicatee. An homage to one, dedication to another: the poem as double-entry bookkeeping.

It starts, we learn, from a newspaper item about the cause of the death rattle, which Shapiro somehow extends to a death sentence on America, and, after various asides, brings to a banal conclusion: "There is no sound before death in America/ You do not see the charred soldier, only pleasure./ We have done away with all noise, but the agony of respiration./ And autumn will be the flag of that new nation." That closing couplet sounds like *cadavre exquis*; but no: it is the "witty" observation of Annie Plumb (whoever she is) that "Botts's picture *Autumn* might become a flag for a new nation." If you think Shapiro's poetry is suspect, consider his art criticism: "What I admire in Botts's work . . . is his intransigent urge to marry figure, flower and the fatal geometry of nature," which, to me, sounds more like a *ménage à trois*.

I could go on citing horrors, but will content myself with a last, supreme example, "Possession: A Zuihitsu," by Kimiko Hahn, who never explains what a zuihitsu is. She received sundry fellowships from, among others, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Theodore Roethke Poetry Prize. A materfamilias and professor at Queens College, Hahn finds numerous sources, Eastern and Western, for her poem.

This zuihitsu hits you in the eye with eighteen prose passages separated by asterisks and double spacing. Some are short, viz. "Mine./ No mine" or "You get your fuckinhands off him girl or you won't have hands for shit" or "*cleave the soul*" or "the dispossessed" or "psychosomatic blunders." Some are clippings from *The Wall Street Journal*, e.g., "Retail consultant Peter Monash estimates that Sam's Club cannibalizes itself in forty-five percent of its markets in a quest of a dominant market share." Others are politcal pronouncements like "There is a vast difference between private and personal property—one which the bourgeoisie has blurred to antagonize and terrorize the working class. At issue: who owns the means of production, including one's labor?" And some are vignettes of family life, presumably the poet's: "when the five-year-old tantrums [a verb, if you please] she alters her demands as the parent yells: *chocolate milk, too white, not this cup, not this spoon*." The zuihitsu ends with the following, perhaps about Hahn's father: "Whether he traveled or stayed home he could not stop thinking about his deceased wife." Such terminal whimpers proliferate throughout the anthology.

Are there, then, no real poems? There are quite a few partial successes, and even one or two full ones. Some pieces so fascinate by their topics that they almost make it as poems. Thus Sherman Alexie's "Capital Punishment," about an execution in prison; Henry Hart's "The Prisoner of Camau," about an American POW tortured by the North Vietnamese; W. S. Merwin's updating of Dunbar's "Lament for the Makers" with his own group epitaph for contemporary American poets; Chase Twichell's shattering account of her visit to an animal shelter. Miss Twichell, like several others here, has problems with closure; thus Karen Volkman's highly promising "The Case" also comes to a bad end. Another woman poet, Wang Ping, memorializes the six drowned Chinese of the *Golden Venture* in "Song of Calling Souls"; touching but overextended, it turns into an essay. Suspicion of prose endangers many other poems here, e.g. those by Frank Gaspar and Reginald Gibbons, without wholly invalidating them.

Reynold Price's "Twenty-One Years" is about how his intensely sexual marriage survives after his paralysis from the waist down. Discreetly yet very movingly, he evokes substitute sexual activities, and the love and pride that makes them feel complete. In "As from a Quiver of Arrows," the black poet Carl Phillips imagines the death of his male lover, and the forms mourning him would take:

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Does his soiled linen count? If so,

would we be wrong then to wash it?
There are no instructions whether it
should go to where are those with no
linen, or whether by night we should
memorially wear it ourselves, by day

reflect upon it folded, shelved, empty.

The poem concludes with the question—and note what the comma adds to it, "What will I do now, with my hands?" These words resonate with the best of them.

Martín Espada has a rather good poem in "Rednecks," and a better one in "Sleeping on the Bus," which, however, must be reproduced entire to score. One of the very best poems is by the late Jane Kenyon, wife of Donald Hall, "Reading Aloud to My Father." We need the whole poem, but will have to make do with its final lines on the moribund:

At the end they don't want their hands
to be under the covers, and if you should put
your hand on theirs in a tentative gesture
of solidarity, they'll pull the hand free;
and you must honor their desire,
and let them pull it free.

Note the pristine simplicity of the language, the chiseled perception, the eye-opening revelation. And also how cadence re-enforces meaning, especially in that dying fall.

Another triumph comes from the oldest poet included, the nonagenarian Stanley Kunitz, a master. In "Touch Me," the old poet is working in his garden. Among other things,

I kneeled to the crickets trilling
underfoot as if about
to burst from their crusty shells;
and like a child again
marvelled to hear so clear
and brave a music pour
from such a small machine.
What makes the engine go?
Desire, desire, desire.

And he ends with an appeal to his wife: "Darling, do you remember/ the man you married? Touch me,/ remind me who I am." One could comment for pages on those last three lines.

What, finally, does Miss Rich's anthology tell us? That despite her manifest tendentiousness, she could not avoid some genuine poems, mostly from established poets, though not from all: she comes up with very middling stuff from Margaret Atwood and Jean Valentine.

All of which makes me wonder: is poetry at the end of its tether? Have all, or almost all, poems been written? Are there only epigones left, now and then finding a grain left unpicked? Is most of what we can get in 1996 and hereafter either reheated leftovers or wanderings far afield from real poetry? I do not know the answers. But I worry.

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Women & politics: Madame de Genlis

by Renee Winegarten

Near the end of Jane Austen's *Emma*, the heroine alludes to a novel by a prolific French writer who is scarcely known today. It is *Adèle et Théodore* by Mme. de Genlis (1746–1830). Jane Austen's comments on the French novelist's work often have an ironic undertone, but she was indebted to it. When *Emma* was published in December 1815, Mme. de Genlis was alive and well in Paris, immensely famous throughout Europe as a playwright and novelist, and as a writer on education. She was also reviled in certain quarters for her involvement in revolutionary politics. She had been presented at the court of Louis XV; she had visited Voltaire (as who of consequence had not?). She lived through the Revolution, the Directory, the First Consulate and Empire of Napoleon, and the Restoration of the Bourbons; and she was to witness the ascent of her pupil, Louis-Philippe, to the throne of France as "the Citizen King" in 1830. In her long life she knew the extremes of poverty and wealth, power and exile, political influence and scandal.

It is a fairly common misconception that French society allowed as little scope for women to discuss and participate in politics as the world portrayed in Jane Austen's novels. Mme. de Staël, when residing in England, viewed with distaste the ritual withdrawal of the English ladies after dinner, just when the conversation was becoming seriously interesting. As she privately told the disapproving Duke of Wellington, "For me, to talk politics is to live." It might be thought that Germaine de Staël, daughter of an important minister of finance, was an exception. Not in the least. In the years before the French Revolution of 1789, everyone was talking politics, and that included women, since they ruled over the Parisian salons where the art of conversation was famously practised as nowhere else in Europe.

As usual, however, matters were not simple. In theory, the conventional forms of society demanded that women should be seen to play their ideal feminine role as perfect wives and mothers. Consequently, women who were known to have a hand in politics could always be attacked—often virulently—as ambitious meddlers who had forsaken their proper sphere. There was the situation as it existed in reality, and the lip service that had to be paid to the social ideal. Here was the quandary from which no intelligent woman could escape. It led to loud protestations of innocence and ignorance, public denials of any political involvement whatsoever, by women writers like Mme. de Staël and Mme. de Genlis, denials that should not be taken at their face value.

There were precedents for women's involvement in political affairs in France, a country where the historical imagination counts for much in intelligent discourse. Nearly a hundred years before Mme. de Genlis was born, the civil wars known as the

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Fronde (1648–1653) saw highborn ladies like the duchesse de Longueville playing a visibly active role. As the last significant revolt of the nobles against royal power, the Fronde was certainly not forgotten. Leading actors in the Revolution of 1789 were inspired not only by their idea of ancient Rome, by the recent triumph of the American Revolution, and by the seventeenth-century civil wars in England and the grim precedent of the execution of Charles I, but also by the civil strife of the Fronde. The bizarre fluctuations of the Fronde, sometimes resulting from a nobleman's change of mistress, could be followed in the highly entertaining memoirs of one of the leading conspirators, Cardinal de Retz. Mme. de Genlis who was largely self-taught, with the self-sufficiency that frequently distinguishes the autodidact, instructed herself in French history and literature. She enjoyed reading about rebellions and conspiracies, and she was thoroughly familiar with the memoirs of the Machiavellian Cardinal de Retz.

The rise of Mme. de Genlis from somewhat dubious circumstances to a position of eminence and political influence, was due to talent, intelligence, study, industry, single-minded ambition, a certain deviousness—and the system of patronage. She was also extremely attractive—eyes full of life, lovely chestnut hair. Her conversation enchanted her hearers, endowed as she was with the piquancy, wit, grace, and charm, without which (it is said) a Frenchwoman is unlikely to achieve anything in the power game. No ugly woman can succeed in politics, Edith Cresson was to declare unequivocally when she became France's first woman prime minister in 1991.

Mme. de Genlis, *née* Caroline-Stéphanie-Félicité du Crest, was descended from an ancient Burgundian noble family whose menfolk traditionally served in the army. Her father was therefore often absent on service. Unable to settle his debts, he would spend some time in prison. His wife struggled to bring up their two children, Félicité and Charles-Louis. For a while, Mme. du Crest enjoyed the protection of a wealthy tax collector (whose wife had notoriously left him to become *maîtresse en titre* or the official mistress—and unofficial minister of state—of Louis XV, as the marquise de Pompadour). When this protector wearied of supporting the du Crest family, Félicité's mother moved to the mansion (and possibly the bed) of another wealthy tax collector, a noted patron of the arts, who kept his own orchestra on the premises. At thirteen, Félicité was encouraged to pursue her passion for music: in particular, her proficiency on the harp was very much admired.

This period of relative security was shortlived. Mme. du Crest then tried to profit from her daughter's musical gifts by taking her into gatherings of the upper crust, where the girl performed on the harp after suppe. Félicité was never treated as a fellow guest. A fee would be discreetly passed to her mother. Sometimes, charity would take the form of dresses the hostess no longer wanted. The humiliation rankled so much that years later Félicité would give offense to one condescending benefactress whom she satirized in *Adèle et Théodore*. Félicité's resentment would unite with the general resentment against unearned privilege that forms so potent a motive in revolutionary movements.

She might even have continued as a professional musician, thoroughly *déclassée*, but she was saved from this dismal fate. Her father, returning from an expedition to the French colony of Saint-Domingue, had been taken prisoner by the English. According to Félicité's romantic account in her memoirs, he showed his daughter's portrait to a fellow prisoner, a young naval hero, who—like Tamino in Mozart's *The Magic Flute*—promptly fell in love with the model. This was Charles-Alexis Bruslart, Comte de Genlis, scion of the younger branch of a powerful family. The couple were married in secret. His family was opposed to the match, and only relented on the birth of her daughter Caroline.

Through her husband's relatives, Félicité

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had access to a different world. One was the granddaughter of Louis XIV's great minister, Louvois, and her circle included a number of elderly survivors of the Sun King's reign. Félicité was fascinated by their reminiscences, taking notes (a perennial habit), gathering firsthand information she was to use in her stories and novels. She found her role model (subject of one of her later, popular romanticized historical books) in Françoise d'Aubigné, marquise de Maintenon, whom some could well remember, bemused as they were by that lady's phenomenal rise to power, and by the extent of her influence on state affairs. How Françoise d'Aubigné, modest widow of the disabled bohemian satirist Paul Scarron, a woman who had led an extremely checkered existence, came to be the morganatic wife of Louis XIV, the most powerful, formal, and remote monarch in Europe astonished everyone. Appointed governess to the numerous illegitimate children of Louis XIV and his extravagant mistress, the marquise de Montespan, Mme. Scarron had charmed the aging king by her unswerving devotion to his children.

What profoundly impressed Félicité was the way in which Mme. de Maintenon established her school for impoverished young girls of the nobility at Saint-Cyr, controlling its rule, finances, and studies. From time to time Mme. de Maintenon, who always dressed soberly in black, would withdraw from the court to Saint-Cyr, enhancing her reputation for dignity, austerity, and piety. Power through gravity and educating the young—here was a lesson that Félicité would take to heart.

It was through her husband's influential relatives that Félicité's destiny was to be changed forever. One of them was instrumental in arranging a marriage between a wealthy heiress and Louis-Philippe-Joseph, duc de Chartres (later to be notorious as Philippe-Egalité), heir to the duc d'Orléans, first prince of the blood royal. As a reward, positions were made available to the Genlis family: Félicité entered the handsome Palais-Royal as lady-in-waiting to the young duchesse de Chartres, a position that could be inherited by her daughters; while her husband became captain of the guards, a post with similar privileges for male descendants. Their joint salary was considerable: moreover, they had the opportunity to solicit positions for members of their family. Later, Félicité's brother, Charles-Louis du Crest, would be appointed *chancelier* or treasurer to the duc de Chartres.

Félicité had occupied her new post only a short time when, as it were by *droit de seigneur*, the duc de Chartres made her his mistress. Louis-Philippe-Joseph was a figure of great elegance and charm, frivolous, dissolute, a close friend of the Prince of Wales (future regent and George IV), and famed for his Anglomania. One great cause of resentment for Louis-Philippe-Joseph was the fact that the present house of Orléans took its descent from an illegitimate daughter of Mme. de Montespan and Louis XIV who—at the instigation of Mme. de Maintenon, keen on the establishment of her charges—had insisted on the alliance, and the Sun King was not to be disobeyed. The leading members of the house of Orléans, the younger branch of the Bourbons, were usually bitter about their ill-treatment (real and/or imagined) at the hands of the senior branch, whose issue occupied the throne. The traditional Orléans role, followed by Louis-Philippe-Joseph, who inherited the title of duc d'Orléans in 1785, was to side with the Parlement in its conflicts with the king. A thorn in the flesh of Louis XVI, the ruling monarch, the duc d'Orléans—along with his circle—had no love for Queen Marie-Antoinette either: she was widely detested for her extravagance and her supposed debauchery, and many even maintained that the heir to the throne was not the king's son.

Félicité was too intelligent to imagine that she could hold Louis-Philippe-Joseph's attention for long simply as his mistress. Still, she could be the Egeria of a prince who was only too conscious of his lack of

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formal education, and who might easily become regent one day. After all, his licentious great-grandfather, Philippe d'Orléans, had ruled as regent after the death of Louis XIV. Moreover, remembering the egregious example of Mme. de Maintenon's role in education at Saint-Cyr, Félicité could exercise influence over the next generation. To please Mme. de Genlis, Louis-Philippe-Joseph had a house built for her in the grounds of the convent of Bellechasse (quite close to where the Musée d'Orsay stands today). She retired there with his heir, Louis-Philippe, his daughter Adélaïde, and his younger sons. Félicité's pupils included her own children, Caroline and Pulchérie de Genlis (her son having died at the age of five), and later, two "English girls," Paméla and Hermine, rightly or wrongly assumed by scandalmongers to be the offspring of Félicité and Louis-Philippe-Joseph.

Mme. de Genlis was now graced with the high official masculine title of *Gouverneur* or tutor to the Orléans princes (not governess). She was the first woman to occupy such an important position, one usually allotted to a military man. This appointment gave rise to much savage satirical comment. "Is it because I am a woman?" she riposted with spirit. Could not women succeed just as well as men, and even better, in every sphere? she asked rhetorically. "There are women who have commanded armies, there are some who have reigned, who are still reigning gloriously." She could have been thinking of the duchesse de Longueville, known as the moving spirit of the Fronde, who led armies; and of her own contemporary, Catherine the Great, empress of Russia. Clearly, Félicité's thoughts were running on command, thrones, and glory.

At Bellechasse, Mme. de Genlis reigned supreme, having complete control of the plan of education, keeping careful records of expenditure and daily conduct, and—like Mme. de Maintenon—accepting no remuneration herself. Her methods were innovative. Her favored pupil, Louis-Philippe, who came to love her, was to remember when "King of the French" how as a boy he had to sleep on bare boards, engage in strenuous physical exercise in all weathers, and learn to turn his hand to manual labor as carpenter, blacksmith, and groom—all of which, together with the study of modern languages, including English, served him well during his years of exile in the United States. There were visits to see how goods were made, meetings with craftsmen, and generous displays of charity to win popularity. Above all, Mme. de Genlis encouraged Louis-Philippe to despise the extravagance of the court, to scorn titles and privileges. She taught him to "seek the people's love which alone builds the reputation of princes," as she once expressed it. Consequently, when he ascended the throne in 1830, he dismantled the royal household, much to the loathing of aristocrats who lost their sinecures, and he sought to live as far as possible like his fellow citizens. (In general, the French were displeased, since what they really wanted was a monarchy of splendor and glory.)

Mme. de Genlis, no mean actress herself, wrote plays for her pupils to perform, as well as plays for adults. She wrote fiction together with books on history, morals, and education, including *Adèle et Théodore ou Lettres sur l'éducation* (Théodore becoming the pet name for Louis-Philippe, Adèle being that of his sister Adélaïde). Her role, her writings on conduct and education brought her widespread fame outside France. When she visited England in 1785 and 1788, she was feted by royalty, aristocracy, and notabilities in the world of literature, art, and politics, from Fanny Burney and Joshua Reynolds to Edmund Burke.

In an age before the formation of coherent political parties (which were to emerge out of the Revolution), and when the word *parti* meant little more than faction, the main center of discontent in 1787–89 was to be found at the Palais-Royal. For much of that time Félicité remained, if no longer the lover, the confidante of the

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duc d'Orléans, who employed his vast wealth in buying popularity (after the manner of Cardinal de Retz). Around the figure whom many then regarded as the "savior of the people," there flocked genuine idealists as well as those eager for power and place, serious aristocratic reformers together with dissidents of all ranks and colors. Among them were not only Félicité's husband and brother, but Talleyrand (whom she had known since she was a girl), Mirabeau (who claimed to be her lover), and La Fayette.

One of Félicité's protégés was Brissot, onetime scurrilous journalist, whom she managed to rescue from imprisonment in the Bastille, and who remained forever in her debt. The future leader of the Brissotins, or Girondins as they are better known, wrote to Félicité's brother:

> Since the end of the civil war known as the Fronde, there has been only one triumphant party in France, that of the Court. The great art of leading a party, an art that the Cardinal de Retz understood so well and used so ill, has been lost through want of practice and all intrigues have been limited to a change of ministers.

Henceforward, a party of defenders of the people against ministerial despotism should be created on the English model. "The head of this party should be the house of Orléans," Brissot proposed.

Much to her fury, Mme. de Genlis found her position of influential confidante undermined when Choderlos de Laclos, author of the sensational novel *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, was appointed private secretary to the duc d'Orléans. The rivalry of the two writers and their mutual hatred knew no bounds. He painted a portrait of her in vitriol; she, with Cassandra-like warnings, did her best to have him dismissed. Louis-Philippe-Joseph took no notice: "You deserve to be consulted on questions of history and literature," he told her airily, "but you do not understand anything about politics." He also suggested that she was incapable of appreciating the "new ideas." All the same, a great ditherer, without any real principles of his own, he continued to ask her advice without always following it.

Mme. de Genlis was hoping that the States-General, which met in May 1789 for the first time since 1614, would culminate in the reform of many abuses, among them surviving feudal rights and the arbitrary *lettre de cachet* (by means of which, for instance, a husband could have his erring wife immured without appeal in a convent for the rest of her days). In her salon at Bellechasse, she welcomed writers and musicians on Saturdays, and the political world on Sundays. Among the habitués could be found great aristocrats keen to resign their privileges like Mathieu de Montmorency; or Talleyrand, the supreme opportunist; along with many of lesser degree whose names were to become familiar in the annals of the Revolution, like Brissot or the constitution-maker, abbé Sieyès.

In July 1789, hearing that people were tearing down the walls of the Bastille, stone by stone, Mme. de Genlis hastened to witness the scene with her pupils, the young Orléans princes. As an early example of radical chic, she took to wearing a medallion made of polished stone from the Bastille, set with jewels: in the center was the word "Liberté" in diamonds, surrounded by a garland of laurel leaves made of emeralds. Soon, she was visiting the clubs and listening to debates in the National Assembly with young Louis-Philippe. Her pupil would be found crossing out his title and signing documents as "French prince in expiation of his sins and Jacobin to his fingertips." Brissot was later to say of Mme. de Genlis that in those heady days she held views "more republican than those of many republicans who are slandering her today." Her enemies knew her as "la jacobine" or "that Jacobin woman."

Conspiracy theories were rife: any upheaval was attributed to "Orléans gold." The march of women of the lower orders on Versailles in October 1789, which Félicité witnessed, and which resulted in the

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humiliating forced return of Louis XVI and the royal family to Paris, was widely ascribed to an Orléans plot, whose aim was to establish Louis-Philippe-Joseph as regent. If he had dared, he might have seized power then. Instead, he departed hastily with Laclos for England (where he was to remain until July 1790), much to the disgust of supporters like Mirabeau, who decided that he was nothing but a weak reed. Mme. de Genlis seems to have drawn a similar conclusion. She published two addresses that caused a sensation. One, concerning the proper education of the heir to the throne, suggested the appointment of a suitably superior person (herself?) as tutor. The other favored adoption: the questionable heir apparent could thus be replaced by a more meritorious candidate—doubtless her own pupil, Louis-Philippe. "She should be advised in her own interest to leave political matters alone," declared one angry critic.

The question of an Orléans regency would arise once again after the abortive flight of Louis XVI and his family and their capture at Varennes. Amid talk of dethronement, Louis-Philippe-Joseph could not decide whether to make a move. Notwithstanding his remarks on Félicité's lack of competence in political affairs, he consulted her. She said she was against his promotion to regent, believing him to lack the character essential for the high position. (Besides, her thoughts were then running on the future of his heir.) He asked her to compose his formal deed of renunciation, which he signed and published. In desperation, Laclos conspired to have Louis-Philippe-Joseph declared regent in spite of himself, but Félicité outmaneuvered him. She sent her husband in haste to the mayor of Paris to denounce the plot. It was the end of Laclos at the Palais-Royal, with the unfortunate consequence that her husband replaced him as Louis-Philippe-Joseph's chief personal advisor.

As the climate worsened, Mme. de Genlis urged Louis-Philippe-Joseph, as well as her husband, to leave for the United States while there was still time, but in vain. Both were elected to the National Convention. Like many weak people, Louis-Philippe-Joseph sought by extremism to give an impression of strength and consistency. Philippe-Egalité, as he was now known, sat with the Jacobins, who simply used him as their tool. He was to vote with them for the death of his cousin, Louis XVI. Félicité was horrified. It was an act that sullied his own name and all those associated with him. Her husband, though, honorably refused to vote for the king's execution, and would die by the guillotine only a few days before Philippe-Egalité. At his trial, her former lover had been questioned about that "perfidious intriguer" Mme. de Genlis: he declared that she "did not deserve my trust."

Mme. de Genlis was a revolutionary of the first hour, the early period of blissful dawn. When she wished to summarize the benefits of the Revolution, she declared (without much thought for the victims): "There are two things abolished for ever: *lettres de cachet* and the tyranny of classes and of feudal rights . . . I never thought people went too far, but I always thought they went too fast." In her memoirs, published many years later in 1825, during the reactionary Bourbon Restoration, she regretfully observed: "My indignation against certain easily reformable abuses inspired me with a kind of enthusiasm for the beginning of a revolution whose consequences I did not foresee." It is a refrain that echoes down to our own day.

Given the opprobrium that attached to the name of Philippe-Egalité and to anyone suspected of the "sin" of Orleanism, of seeking to promote an Orléans party, Mme. de Genlis tried to distance herself as far as she could from her former patron and his family. She had become an exile: her wanderings were to last some seven years, and would take her from Bremgarten in Switzerland to Hamburg, Altona, Silk, Hamburg again, and Berlin. At times, she was favored by German princes or members of the nobility; and she enjoyed the hospitality

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of cultivated well-to-do Jewish ladies in Berlin, to whom she gave lessons. Her talent as a musician and her piquant conversation always made her welcome among like-minded spirits.

In difficult circumstances, she was trying to earn her living and to lead an independent life, writing stories, novels, travel books—ready to turn her hand to anything, even to painting floral designs for textiles. At the same time, she was pursued by enemies who were influential enough to secure her departure from a place of asylum. Antagonists ranged from Jacobins to monarchist émigrés like the sharp-tongued Rivarol. He wrote luridly of her association with Philippe-Egalité, calling her with no little exaggeration the "moving spirit of his councils, instigator of his plans, apologist of his evil deeds, and corruptress of his children: a woman who left him only at the scaffold." In this version, Philippe-Egalité had been merely the "vile instrument of a Fury" who was still living and active.

It would be surprising if Mme. de Genlis did not feel afraid. She had already published several attempts to justify herself. Now she tried again. Her account of her conduct since the Revolution, with the open "Letter from Silk" addressed to Louis-Philippe, can be regarded as a political act. She maintained there that Louis-Philippe's ideas were more democratic than hers, that he was ardently republican, and that he held extreme views on equality. Her former pupil regarded these comments by his onetime revolutionary guide and mentor with no little irony. They had gone their separate ways, after a quarrel.

As for herself, she insisted (none too truthfully) she had always lived quietly in retirement, devoting herself solely to literature, submissive to every established government, "for such should be the conduct of a woman and it has always been my own." She was eager to distance herself from Louis-Philippe and any Orleanist faction, in her desire for reconciliation with the Directory, so that she might return at last to Paris. Doubtless moved by her fears and her insecure situation, she stressed the folly of any desire on his part to be the leader of an Orléans party and a constitutional monarch, at a time when there existed a republic founded on morality and justice (odd terms to be applied to the Directory, that byword for immorality and illegality). Moreover, she added tactlessly, you have neither the talents nor the qualities necessary for the role. You have many virtues, suited to a domestic life, "but you do not have those required of great kings." Rare were those who believed that she had really parted company from Louis-Philippe: they thought the Letter from Silk was part of some political maneuver. Its candid assessment of his character was to prove a gift to his enemies, and would be reprinted at various crucial moments in his political career.

The coup d'état of Napoleon Bonaparte on 18 Brumaire (November) 1799 opened the way for Félicité's return to Paris. She arrived in 1800 to find everything changed, from street names to manners. Bonaparte's close adviser, Talleyrand, had been corresponding with her during the years of their dispersal. Whenever he now called on her, she saw him in private. It soon came to General Bonaparte's notice that Mme. de Genlis and her pen might be useful to him. She was granted a pension, and an apartment in the official residence of the Arsénal Library. There she held court, welcoming persons either connected with Bonaparte or favorable to him, while denigrating those—like Mme. de Staël—who were not.

In return for her pension, Mme. de Genlis was expected to write fortnightly to the Emperor on a subject of her choice (apparently, he never received her in audience). The fact was that the upstart conqueror of Europe would never feel secure. He had his paid hacks to uphold his policies in the subsidized press. He employed Fouché, one of the most renowned spymasters of all time, without fully trusting him (rightly as it turned out). Spies were everywhere. Any detail, however trivial, might yield a nugget

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of information about public opinion. According to Mme. de Genlis, she wrote to Napoleon on non-political matters of religion and morality, on methods for improving trade and providing employment, on the education and well-being of the people. However, this is not the whole story.

Talleyrand relates how he read aloud one of her reports to Napoleon soon shortly after the battle of Austerlitz:

> She spoke of opinion in Paris, quoting several offensive remarks uttered in what was then called the faubourg Saint-Germain [that is, the neighborhood of the old aristocracy]; she named five or six families who, she added, would never support the Emperor's government. Certain scathing remarks that she reported sent Napoleon into a paroxysm of fury: he swore, he thundered against the faubourg Saint-Germain . . . When? A few hours after a decisive victory over the Russians and the Austrians.

That she "named" five or six families would appear to confirm the view of those contemporaries who regarded her as Napoleon's spy.

Meanwhile, an endless stream of books renewed her literary fame, which was used politically (like everything else in the First Empire). It served as a counterbalance to Mme. de Staël's undeviating opposition to the Emperor's authoritarian regime. All the same, even Mme. de Genlis herself fell foul of Napoleon's censorship. She was not permitted to publish extracts from the memoirs of the marquis de Dangeau (a contemporary of Mme. de Maintenon's) that she had discovered in the Arsénal Library. Nor would Napoleon allow her to publish her book on the first Bourbon king, the ever popular Henri IV, for the Emperor did not want anything that showed the Bourbons in a good light. Unlike Mme. de Staël, who resisted in public, Mme. de Genlis yielded in private. True, she did not have at her disposal Mme. de Staël's considerable means; besides, she claimed to admire Napoleon, whose armies had ravaged Europe from Spain to Russia, as the restorer of "religion, order and peace"!

By April 1814, and Napoleon's abdication, the tone had changed, and Mme. de Genlis was commenting to Talleyrand on this "long tragedy, this pretentious and blood-stained drama," so ill planned and badly directed. Along with Talleyrand, prime secret mover of the Restoration, and countless others, she rallied to the Bourbons, whose virtues she had apparently loved devotedly all the time. Louis XVIII received her at court, but he was disinclined to accept her offer of regular letters. Her book on his remote ancestor, Henri IV, adorned with some unfavorable remarks on Bonaparte, was published—with most unfortunate timing—just as the usurper made his extraordinary escape from Elba in March 1815 and swiftly arrived in Paris. All enthusiasm, she began again writing letters to him, but he ignored them and did not restore her pension. After his defeat at Waterloo, and the return of the Bourbons, she was not long in expressing her undying devotion to them.

Mme. de Genlis was no more opportunistic than most of her masculine contemporaries, who frequently turned their coat. How difficult it was to keep on an even and consistent path when faced with that rapid succession of regimes upon which depended one's financial survival, social standing, possibilities for place, action, and influence! Throughout the Bourbon Restoration, however, she would enjoy the patronage of her erstwhile pupil, Louis-Philippe, with whom she was now reconciled, and who had returned to the Palais-Royal. Producing fiction as well as didactic literary works, memoirs, books on manners and etiquette, she also grew deeply engaged in polemics in favor of religion, waging a futile war against the *philosophes* of the Enlightenment, including their disciple Mme. de Staël. Mme. de Genlis herself had moved from being "la jacobine" of 1790–91 to the

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ultra or extreme royalist of 1820–30, though she would on no account join those who thought the Revolution was all bad, or who wanted to return completely to the ancien régime as if nothing had happened.

Her trajectory from revolutionary sympathizer and activist to embattled conservative may look familiar, her inconsistency and her veerings often bizarre, yet in a climate openly hostile to women's participation in political affairs, she could write in her memoirs: "I have known . . . women worthy of respect who had a taste for public affairs, and I approved of them for taking part," because, she added, they had the temperament and the talents essential for success in that field. This approval was a considerable admission for her day, and might have been thought self-referential. On the contrary, it was followed by the usual disclaimers: for she could not possibly be included among such spirits; lacking ambition, too busy writing books, she had never engaged in politics, and she herself certainly had no gifts in that area. If only the lady did not protest so much!

In fact, Mme. de Genlis had not only held advanced political views—as a "democrat," indeed, as a republican before Robespierre, if Brissot is to be believed—she had also ventured to translate them into publications and into action, at some cost to her reputation and even at times to her existence. Disconcertingly, though, she moved between impulsive courage and social timidity, as if reminding herself how, as a woman, she would be perceived in society. Without this burdensome limit on frankness, she could have revealed much more about what a frustrated reviewer of her intriguing memoirs in 1825 called her "complicity" with her age.

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Mark Twain: more "tears and flapdoodle"

by James W. Tuttleton

Persons attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished; persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot.—By Order of the Author per G.G., Chief of Ordnance.
—Mark Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

The discovery in 1991 of the lost half of the manuscript of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*—some 665 holograph pages in the hand of its author, Samuel L. Clemens—was one of those chance events in the literary world that electrify scholars who are always waiting for the big find. In the case of *Huck Finn*, the already-known part of the manuscript had since 1885 reposed in the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library in upstate New York. It was donated to the library by its sometime curator, James Fraser Gluck, who had asked Twain for the manuscript, much as we ask for autographs today. Afterward Twain was to learn the monetary value of his papers, and he regularly sold them to wealthy collectors like J. P. Morgan. But in 1885 he was simply flattered by the request and obliged by sending Gluck all the handwritten leaves he could find—the text of the last half of the novel. "I have hunted the house over, and that is all I can find," he told Gluck. The first half, he said, must have been "sent to the printers, who never returned it."

Some months later, though, Twain found the rest and sent it to Gluck, who must have taken it home to read and evidently forgot all about the rest. In any case, the last half went to the library, and the delayed first half went into a trunk, which was passed down the family line and inherited by two of Gluck's granddaughters in Los Angeles. It was they who recognized their find and in 1991 asked Sotheby's to authenticate the manuscript and find a buyer and publisher.

Library officials in Buffalo immediately objected to the sale of the fragment, claiming that the Library was the true owner of the holograph and that, as the beneficiary of Gluck's gift, the manuscript was in effect an "overdue book." The Gluck heirs demurred. Then the Mark Twain Foundation, which holds rights to the intellectual content of Twain's writing and which has sponsored the impressive University of California edition of Twain's complete works, raised an objection to any infringement of *its* legal rights to the contents of the manuscript. Thanks to some complicated negotiations, litigation over ownership rights was finally averted, and the two parts of the manuscript of *Huck Finn* have been reunited at the upstate library. Now the full manuscript text of the novel, newly published by Random House,[1] is ready for analysis. What does it tell us?

1 *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn: A Comprehensive Edition,* by Mark Twain, with an introduction by Justin Kaplan, foreword and addendum by Victor Doyno; Random House, 488 pages, $23.

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First, that Twain, as was often the case, had poor judgment about good taste and felt obliged, in revision, to emend or to cancel some unsatisfactory scenes, sentences, and usages that were, or would have been, offensive to most readers or a defect in the art of the novel. Some of the manuscript revisions are minor—like the portrait of an overweight black woman at the Holy Roller camp meeting who, rapt in religious ecstasy, wants to smother whites with kisses but is repelled by them. Another revision involves the "House of Death" scene, where Huck and Jim find the murdered Pap in a house that has collapsed into the Mississippi River and is drifting southward. Victor Doyno, a Twain scholar at the State University of New York at Buffalo, wants us to believe that the manuscript indicates that Pap died in a one-woman brothel; but the argument is unconvincing. Another difference involves an anecdote of a raftsman that Twain shifted to *Life on the Mississippi*.

The most striking difference between the new manuscript section and the novel as originally published is a three-page scene in which, during a storm of thunder and lightning, Huck and Jim leave the river and take cover in a cave. During the storm Jim tells Huck about an encounter with a ghost. As Jim tells it, at the age of sixteen he had been ordered by his master, a young medical student, to go to the college and warm up a cadaver so that it could be dissected. Jim goes to the examining room in the dead of night, in a storm, to get the body ready, only to see the stiff begin to move its toes. Jim panics, the corpse falls on him, and he bolts from the room, convinced that a ghost has assaulted him. Later the medical student dismembers the cadaver and derides Jim for his superstition and fear. Grisly and gothic, the tale is an instance of how something morbid and funereal could tickle Twain into a dark gallows humor.

One of the lawyers involved in the negotiations over the manuscript encouraged Daniel Menaker, then at *The New Yorker*, to publish this ghost story in the issue of June 26, 1995. After Menaker moved to Random House, he struck a deal with the sometime litigants to publish the manuscript *in toto* as *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn: A Comprehensive Edition*. Poor reproductions of some thirty pages of the manuscript illustrate the book; Justin Kaplan has provided a preface; and Victor Doyno has provided a running commentary, not always persuasive, on what the revisions indicate.

In my judgment this "comprehensive edition" should never have been published—at least under this title. A facsimile of the manuscript would have been preferable. Failing that, a transcription of the manuscript, properly designated as such, so as to distinguish it from the authorized printed text of the novel, would have been acceptable. But the makers of this book—heirs, lawyers, foundation execs, publishers, and editors—were out for a quick buck, and, in the process, they were not above corrupting the text of an American classic—the 1885 novel that Twain approved and ushered into print. The book represents a violation of the principles of textual scholarship in editing. The cancelled passages should have been relegated to an appendix as rejected substantives. They should not have been inserted into the text—where there is only the slightest of typographical indications to signal an insertion. In any case, the book cannot be substituted for the authorized 1885 edition; it cannot be used as the basis of any sound literary criticism; and its release to the reading public can only create a misunderstanding about *Huck Finn* amongst general readers. Moreover, if this text is later pirated or reprinted without the foreword and afterword, readers will have no idea that what they are reading is not the text Twain authorized. In reinserting cancelled readings into the text of the novel and calling the novel a "Comprehensive Edition," the makers of this book suggest that the novel we have always known is defective or partial. In fact it is not. The edition is a violation Twain's aesthetic intention and deserves the *oubliette*.

Here is Daniel Menaker, the Senior Ed-

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itor at Random House and one of the perpetrators of this travesty, commenting on the book:

> . . . when Twain set out to write this book he had something even darker and more satirical in mind: something that I now think of as the book he would have published if he were alive now—a *Huckleberry Finn* for the nineties, so to speak—because the constraints and limits that operated upon him when he was composing the book no longer exist in public discourse and publishing today. He could have shown a slave woman embracing whites. He could have made it more evident that Huck's father, pap Finn, died in a one-woman brothel. Both of these intentions, among many others, are clear in the manuscript and are presented and discussed in the new and comprehensive edition of the novel.

Menaker's comments make it plain that the Random House edition of *Huck Finn* is to be preferred because it is supposedly more in harmony with the liberated sexual mores of the 1990s. The implication is that, in the 1880s, a false gentility prevented Twain from mentioning such things as bordellos or interracial sex, and so he eliminated them from *Huck*. We of course are liberated, Mr. Menaker seems to suggest, and can take the daring descriptions. This is nonsense. As a prospector and journalist in the West, Twain made it plain in books like *Roughing It* (1871) that frontier life thrived on the towns' ubiquitous saloons and whorehouses. Then, too, Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1894) is a fully developed study of Southern miscegenation and its effects on the boys Tom and Chambers, one white and one black, who were switched in the cradle by the vengeful slave mother Roxy. Blood, race, sex, revenge—it is all there in Dawson's Landing.

However, Twain knew that he needed—and he regularly solicited—editorial advice about his manuscripts. As a result of his upbringing in the Old Southwest and his frontier years, he grew up frankly coarse, irreverent, often profane, and occasionally beyond the pale of civilized discourse. In the heat of composition he could go overboard without even thinking of the reader's response. He knew that he was sometimes gross, did not want to be, and he begged his wife, Olivia, and others to save him from his own lapses of aesthetic judgment. William Dean Howells, his editor at the *Atlantic*, was enlisted to read and critique nearly every manuscript. Twain asked Mrs. Mary Fairbanks, a woman he had met on the *Quaker City* expedition, to point out really gross or overwrought passages in his manuscripts.

Toward the beginning of his career he wrote to Olivia: "If you and Mother Fairbanks will only scold and upbraid me now and then, I shall fight my way through the world, never fear." Later he told F. M. White: "Ever since we have been married, I have been dependent on my wife to go over and revise my manuscript. . . . Not but that I can do the spelling and grammar alone—if I have a spelling-book and grammar with me—but I don't always know just where to draw the line in matters of taste. Mrs. Clemens has kept a lot of things from getting into print that might have given me a reputation I wouldn't care to have, and that I wouldn't have known any better than to have published."

These remarks prove that Twain needed editing and wanted it, that he solicited it and concurred with it in very nearly every case where he saw that he had crossed the line. Was this censorship (or rather self-censorship) repressive of his genius? Hardly. It in fact devolved into a game for the sake of his own children. Here is Twain in his autobiography commenting on his wife's editorial excisions:

> She would sit on the porch at the farm and read aloud, with her pencil in her hand, and the children would keep an alert and suspicious eye upon her right along, for the belief was well grounded in them that whenever she came across a particularly satisfactory passage she would strike it out. . . . The passages

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> which were so satisfactory to them always had an element of strength in them which sorely needed modification or expurgation, and was always sure to get it at their mother's hand. For my own entertainment, and to enjoy the protests of the children, I often abused my editor's innocent confidence. I often interlarded remarks of a studied and felicitously atrocious character purposely to achieve the children's delight to see the pencil do its fatal work. I often joined my supplications to the children's for mercy, and strung the argument out and pretended to be in earnest. . . . Now and then we gained the victory and there was much rejoicing. Then I privately struck the passage out myself.

Far from abandoning his creative intuition or sacrificing his art on the altar of Genteel Era respectability, Twain learned both to please himself and to please his reading audience. He accepted (or rejected) others' advice as he saw fit. But once Twain had completed his text the way he wanted it, he was ruthless about anyone's changing it. He grew up a printer's devil, made a youthful living by setting type, and he had inflexible ideas about the composition of the page. Extant instructions to his typesetters show that Twain would tolerate absolutely no printhouse changes in the setting copy—not even a change in a comma or semicolon. And he rained down some rather colorful curses and wild maledictions on any publisher or printer who tried to alter his text without his approval.

An instance of Twain's animosity to careless or "inventive" typesetters is his complaint to Elisha Bliss that the compositor for *Innocents Abroad* was "spiteful" and "infernally unreliable" in persistently misspelling words. "He never yet has acceded to a request of mine made in the margin, in the matter of spelling and punctuation, that I know of." The typesetting for *Huckleberry Finn* proved somewhat better, largely because Howells prepared two typescripts (now lost) from the manuscript and the compositors had an easier time of it. "Most of this proof" for *Huck Finn*, Twain told his nephew Charles Webster, is "clean & beautiful, & a pleasure to read; but the rest of it was read by that blind idiot whom I have cursed so much, & is a disgraceful mess." Furthermore, he added, "If all the proofs had been as well read [by the proofreader] as the first 2 or 3 chapters were, I should not have needed to see the revises at all. On the contrary it was the worst & silliest proof-reading I have ever seen. It was never read by copy at all—not a single galley of it."

Twain's irascibility at this time might have been accentuated by some dental problems. In any case, about early packets of the proof-slips he told Howells: the printers "don't make a very great many mistakes, but those that do occur are of a nature to make a man curse his teeth loose." But as more proof came in, with even worse careless printhouse errors, he exploded to Howells: "I am sending you these infernal Huck Finn proofs—but the very last vestige of my patience has gone to the devil, & I cannot bear the sight of another slip of them. My hair turns white with rage, at sight of the mere outside of the package." Twain thus gave close attention to his manuscript, to the two typescripts, and to the proofs of *Huck Finn*. Given his rage at even the slightest deviation from the copy he had authorized for typesetting, there is every reason to reject the Random House "improvement" of the novel and continue to read the book in the 1885 text that Twain approved. A handy version of this text is that of the Mark Twain Library edited by Walter Blair and Victor Fischer in 1985 for the University of California Press edition of Twain's complete works.

One final word on this matter of censorship. The help of advisers like Olivia and Howells did not always exempt Twain from criticism on the ground of vulgarity. When *Huck Finn* was published, it was banned from the Concord, Massachusetts, library on the ground of its being "trash suitable only for the slums": "It deals with a series of adventures of a very low grade of morality;

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it is couched in the language of a rough dialect, and all through its pages there is a systematic use of bad grammar and an employment of rough, coarse, inelegant expressions." All of this is quite true but is overwhelmed and rendered negligible by the sheer imaginative power and linguistic genius of the writer.

But should *Huck Finn* be read in any edition today? Some say no. Given the imperative of political correctness in racial matters now obtaining, *Huck Finn* is regularly denounced as racist trash. Every year brings one or more accounts of a school board or library effort to ban the novel. As Peaches Henry has remarked in "The Struggle for Tolerance: Race and Censorship in *Huckleberry Finn*," "Black protestors, offended by the repetitions of 'nigger' in the mouths of white and black characters, Twain's minstrel-like portrayal of the escaped slave Jim and of black characters in general, and the negative traits assigned to blacks, [have] objected to the use of *Huck Finn* in English courses."

No doubt some blacks *have* been wounded by the recurrence of the word "nigger" in *Huck Finn*. It is a term that, used as a slur, is patently racist and is meant to offer insult. During the O. J. Simpson case, the defense lawyers spent hours in impeaching the testimony of white Detective Mark Fuhrman, who claimed he had never used the word. The implication of the defense team was that anyone who had ever used the "N-word" (as it was euphemistically described in the courtroom) was not above hating interracial marriage, planting evidence, and framing a national sports hero.

But there is, it seems to me, a problem in the effort of some blacks to banish "nigger" from the English language. Derived from *niger*, the Latin word for black, *Negro* entered the English language through the Spanish and Portuguese, where *Negro* is simply the word for a black person. In the long history of racial relations in this country, Southerners—with their customary difficulty in pronouncing the terminal *-er* sound—transposed it into a schwa and pronounced it "nigguh." (In this, the terminal phoneme perfectly corresponds to the Latin spelling.) This was, I believe, the universal Southern pronunciation of the word—certainly it was in my boyhood in the South a half-century ago. After the post-World War II civil-rights movement got underway and "nigguh" was deemed offensive, educated Southern whites tried to accommodate, dropped terms like "darkey" and "colored folks," and produced a term supposedly more literate and inoffensive pronounced something like "Nigra." Black activists were still not satisfied, and this too had to be scrapped for the more inoffensive term "black" (we're now back to the etymological meaning of "Negro"). But to achieve parity with other ethnic groups like Franco- or Italo-Americans, "black" too had to be abandoned for "Afro-American." Now, somehow, this too seems demeaning and has to be scrapped—as Jesse Jackson insists—for "African-American."

I understand the bid for respect and the role of ethnic pride in this effort to control what whites call blacks. But the problematic element comes in when we realize that "nigger" is a term commonly used amongst blacks in referring to each other, and it often carries a denotation of the deepest affection. I don't believe that this is a case of a people's adopting the language of the oppressor—except when it is used as an insult. Here it may be useful to remember the distinction made many years ago by the semanticist (later Senator), S. I. Hayakawa in *Language in Thought and Action*. In his persuasive analysis of linguistic usage, Hayakawa pointed out that some words can function either as an insult or a term of endearment. He called these words "snarl words" and "purr words." It is not their denotative content that is communicated but rather an attitude toward the hearer or reader. "Nigguh," when used in anger, derision, or contempt, is clearly an insult; but when used with affection or affability—as it has often been used by many blacks and

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whites over the years—it is a purr word. Twain knew this and used the term both ways. Blacks want to eliminate the term as an insult but preserve it for themselves as a synonym for "Honey," let us say. But language—a powerful emotive instrument, for good or ill—simply doesn't yield to any group's ideological fiat. Ask the French Academy about *franglais*.

Was Twain a racist? For some black activists every white Southerner is *ipso facto* a racist. But the reality is that Twain's letters and notebooks show a continuous commitment to the well-being of blacks. Not only was *Huck Finn* a sustained attack on slavery, the portrait of Jim was charged with personal affection and friendship. After the war, Twain sponsored black students at Northern and Southern colleges. His outrage at postwar Jim Crow racism equalled his detestation of prewar slavery, as essays like "Only a Nigger" (1869) and "The United States of Lyncherdom" (1901) will show. In fact, as Frank Baldanza has remarked in *Mark Twain: An Introduction and an Interpretation*, "Clemens' later sympathies for colored races were so strong that Mrs. Clemens gave her husband a convenient rule of thumb for saving his temper—to consider all men black until proved otherwise."

None of this is likely to satisfy black activists, who have an interest in perpetuating white guilt while eradicating the last vestiges of racism. Nor will it content those whose feelings are wounded by the word "nigger," no matter what the context of its use. As long as this situation continues to be the case, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* will remain controversial.

Given the ongoing controversy, it was to be expected that Gerald Graff would enter the fray to stir things up. He is an academic who has urged the professoriate to substitute "teaching the conflicts" about literature for teaching the literature itself. He has done so again with a co-edited volume (with James Phelan) called *Mark Twain, Adventures of Huckleberry Finn: A Case Study in Critical Controversy*.[2] This volume includes a number of argumentative essays by academic critics on various sociological issues touching the novel. A short section devoted to the end of the novel is included as a sop to those interested in the art of fiction.

But the real objective of the editors is indicated in section headings like "The Controversy over Race: Does *Huckleberry Finn* Combat or Reinforce Racist Attitudes?" and "The Controversy over Gender and Sexuality: Are Twain's Sexual Politics Progressive, Regressive, or Beside the Point?" Both of these rubrics and nearly all of the essays published under them are extraliterary and therefore beside the point, but the book is additional evidence that classrooms, curricula, conventions, and textbooks have now been taken over by the proponents of one or another radical ideology.

The purpose of this series—despite the editors' apparent stance of disinterested argument—is not to elicit student discussion of *Huck Finn* as a work of art (which is the only reason for being interested in it). Such books are really intended to help leftist teachers flush out and condemn crypto-aesthetic, racist, patriarchal, sexist, and homophobic elements in literature and criticism—and student thinking—in order to inculcate in kids a "progressive" viewpoint. This much becomes evident in the editors' admission that

> teaching by controversy accords in spirit with the revisionist impulses underlying attempts both to create a broader and more inclusive canon and to develop new theoretical approaches to literature. We identify ourselves with those working to revise the canon, and we regard the new approaches to literature—approaches that stress issues of race, gender, class, sexuality, and power—as a very positive

2 *Mark Twain, Adventures of Huckleberry Finn: A Case Study in Critical Controversy*, edited by Gerald Graff and James Phelan; St. Martin's Press, 551 pages, $35. Unfortunately, this appears to be the first of a whole series of such books burying classic texts under a ton of politically correct lit-crit.

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force, not least because they have aroused controversy.

In consequence of this politicization of letters, the editors give transparent prominence to arguments about the evils of patriarchal culture, gender as a social construction, and the friendship of Huck and Jim as a manifestation of homosexual desire. Readers of this "boy's book" will be surprised at how it can be ransacked to manufacture feminist criticism; and poor Leslie Fiedler, who first advanced the ridiculous idea that the friendship of Huck and Jim expresses a latent bi-racial homosexuality (in "Come Back to the Raft Ag'in, Huck Honey!" [1948]) is here savaged as a gay-baiting homophobe whose use of the phrase "innocent homosexuality" implies that genital homosexuality isn't. Of course it isn't, but it is a measure of the academic scene that students will now be obliged to read and then discuss such apologists for radical feminism, gay liberation, and other politically correct ideologies rather than concentrating on the art of the novel. Perhaps it is time to call in G. G., Chief of Ordnance.

While we await G. G.'s arrival, we can sit back with *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* itself, a wonderful boy's book of hair-raising adventure that still appeals even in maturity. The earliest attraction evolves into the adult appeal when life makes clear that interwoven into the broad comedy is a stinging satire on the inhumanity of slavery. If the book has trouble keeping its focus on the friendship of Huck and Jim, the reason is doubtless Twain's preference for a structure of changing episodes, each a chapter or two long, that are strung together, in no particular order, like beads on a string.

The episodic structure of the novel allowed Twain to jump from folly to folly in exposing what he would later come to call the "damned human race" living along the river. One of these follies was the Victorian appetite for romantic and sentimental literature—the kind of fiction that Tom reads in order to spring Jim from busted-heart captivity, the kind of verse that Emmeline Grangerford writes in funereal poems like "Ode to Stephen Dowling Bots, Dec'd." *Huck Finn* is in fact an all-round guffaw at the vice, gullibility, folly, and pretention of vain human beings.

Juxtaposed to the ranting illiteracy and racism of the underclass (represented above all by Pap Finn), the blind social complacency of families like the Thatchers and Miss Watson, and the bogus aristocracy of well-to-do Southerners like Colonel Sherburn and the Grangerfords and Shepherdsons, is the friendship of the white boy and the black slave. The novel's central movement is not their drift southward into deep slave territory but the oscillation of Huck and Jim between the raft and the shore. It is an oscillation between a world of violence—represented by the bounty hunters, slave catchers, con men, fake preachers, roving gangs, and feuding families—and a world of peace, freedom, and friendship, represented for these two outcasts by the river and the raft.

Twain couldn't hold on to the pastoral simplicity of this interracial friendship because he was too indignant at other aspects of human folly and, as a professional humorist, he always sacrificed anything solemn if he thought he could get a good laugh. But just for a moment at the center of that book, and flickeringly if not fully realized, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* called into being a dream of personal virtue and human possibility that makes all academic palaver about literary controversies an inessential distraction—what Huck called only "tears and flapdoodle."

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The drawing-room comedy of Iris Murdoch

by Brooke Allen

ONE: *Flavia says Hugo tells her that Augustina is in love with Fred.*

TWO: *"So you've got used to it at last."*
"What an odd way of putting it."
"Well, it is startling, I am startled."
"Because it is so sudden."
"Because of what it is."
"Yes, it is like nothing on earth."
"We *are like nothing on earth."*
"We are made divine. Let us be worthy."
"We shall be."
"To say we are sure may seem rash."
"And naive."
"But we are *sure."*

THREE: *He paid the taxi man. He rang the bell of the third floor flat. He pressed open the front door and began to climb. He heard Rosalind's door opening above—and the pain now came back and the fear, the* awfulness *of the situation, its bottomless void, suddenly something out of Shakespeare, the dreadful peril of the Bard himself. He heard her door opening above and thought, I will recall this.*

Question: two of the preceding quotations are from Iris Murdoch novels, and one is a parody of Murdoch by Malcolm Bradbury. Which is the parody?[1]

It is easy enough to laugh at such stuff, but it should be remembered that only a writer with a strong individual style is worthy of parody; as Hemingway observed, the better the writer, the more easily parodied he is likely to be. Murdoch, whatever her excesses, is undoubtedly one of her period's most original stylists. She has also proved one of the most consistently thought-provoking and, what is possibly more important, one of the most consistently entertaining writers of the last half-century.

A philosopher who has spent much of her professional life as a professor at Oxford, where she has been a Fellow of St. Anne's College since 1948, Murdoch infuses her novels with philosophy yet refuses to be labeled a "philosophical novelist." "The consideration of moral issues in the novels may be intensified by some philosophical consideration," she has said, "but on the whole I think it's dangerous writing a philosophical novel. . . . My novels are not 'philosophical novels.' "

Anyone but the most passionate Murdoch fan would be forced to challenge that statement. All of her novels are to some extent philosophical ones. Those in which Murdoch's pure imaginative powers take precedence over her philosophical or theoretical agenda, such as *A Fairly Honorable Defeat* or *The Sea, The Sea*, are complete works of art, whereas those which give the agenda center stage, like *The Green Knight*, are inferior ones. Murdoch's work could, by the unsympathetic reader, in fact be de-

1 Answer: One. Two is from *The Green Knight*; Three is from Murdoch's new novel, *Jackson's Dilemma*.

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scribed just as the novels of her writer character Arnold Baffin were so cruelly described in *The Black Prince*: "Jesus and Mary and Buddha and Shiva and the Fisher King all chasing round and round dressed up as people in Chelsea."

But most Murdoch enthusiasts (and there are many, especially in England) read her not for her highbrow credentials, her lifelong professional interest in Plato, or her authority on Sartre and existentialism, but because she happens to be a master of drawing-room comedy, a genre that has lost little of its appeal despite the rapidly waning number of drawing rooms and of educated, leisured people to make witty remarks within them. From *Under the Net* (1954), her first published novel, to her newest one, *Jackson's Dilemma*,[2] Murdoch has continued to set her stories within a rather anachronistic upper middle class.

Her characters are intellectuals, high-level civil servants, artists. With the exception of certain "dropouts" from bourgeois society, such as Jake Donoghue in *Under the Net*, they live lives of enviable material ease, unencumbered by financial worries and therefore able to devote the larger part of their waking hours to cultivating their intellectual interests, their relationships, and their souls. The general level of erudition can be downright absurd: fateful meetings occur at philology conferences or Latin Mass Society Dinners; guests at a dinner party will discuss Tolstoy over the soup, Turgenev over the main course, and redemptive suffering over coffee. *A Fairly Honorable Defeat* contains a typical Murdochian lovers' spat, "when Axel had let Simon hold forth for some time about the Titian Pietà in the Accademia before pointing out that it had been finished by Palma Giovane, a fact which Simon certainly ought to have known"—occasioning considerable humiliation for the unfortunate Simon.

These highly stylized lives seem to have been affected neither by postwar austerity nor by the *nouveau riche* social whirl of the Thatcher years. Murdoch makes a few bows to contemporary events like AIDS, but her own "period" was very obviously the Fifties and Sixties, and her novels continue to reflect that way of life. A staggering amount of social drinking goes on: no anemic Chardonnays for these folks, but vast quantities of neat whiskey or, for the Americanized characters, martinis, and no nonsense about alcohol abuse either. A man hitting a woman—or a woman hitting a man—is a common feature of life, and no heavy weather is made over it. Murdoch's schoolchildren continue to learn Latin and Greek as a matter of course, and usually contrive to be fluent in three or four other languages as well. Even in the 1980s and 1990s her teenagers, somewhat fantastically, address one other as "my dear," and young girls reaching the age of sixteen or so still "put up their hair."

The kind of high artificiality in which Murdoch deals is not for everyone. In a review of *Nuns and Soldiers*, Christopher Ricks gave vent to his irritation:

> If you took away the words "a sort of" or "a kind of" the throb would be audibly hollow . . . . Let me string together the formulae—and every single one of them until the end of this review is taken verbatim from *Nuns and Soldiers*. . . . For her admirers, this novel will be a sort of sacred area, characterized by a kind of happy authority, a kind of intelligent pity, a sort of passionate anarchism, a kind of professional detachment, a kind of elated sadness, etc. etc.

I find this tic less annoying than Murdoch's habit of placing every tenth word within quotation marks, but I believe that both result from the practice of philosophical writing, in which the author must be careful about making uncompromising statements that allow for no qualification. In fact, Murdoch's artificiality can, to the receptive reader, constitute a pleasure in its own right, a manifestation of control, ex-

2 *Jackson's Dilemma*, by Iris Murdoch; Viking, 249 pages, $22.95.

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actitude, and occasionally an exquisite preciosity: it is a refreshing experience to read the work of an author who actually uses words like "pendant" and "couchant" without the slightest self-consciousness.

Social comedy supposes an emphasis upon sexual struggle, and this Murdoch depicts with uncanny intelligence. The self-delusions of lovers and spouses and the petty ignoble deceits they visit on one another are exposed with ruthless honesty; the complexities of the married state are never underestimated. "All married people are unhappy," says one of her characters; true, in Murdoch's work (though she herself has been happily married for many years to critic John Bayley), but such unhappiness does not necessarily imply that the partners would be better off apart. In *The Philosopher's Pupil*, friends observing the violent marriage of brutal George McCaffrey and his stoic wife, Stella, who "thought that Stella lived in hell were not wrong; but like all those who do not, they failed to understand that hell is a large place wherein there are familiar refuges and corners." Charles Arrowby in *The Sea, The Sea* eavesdrops on Hartley, the old flame he obsessively loves, and her husband Ben: he hears Ben bullying and Hartley cringing, but fails to consider the rather unsavory pleasures that such habitual playacting can bring, for it turns out that both Hartley and Ben, while fundamentally unhappy, are nevertheless perversely comfortable within the patterns of their forty-year marriage. "Outsiders who see rules and not the love that runs through them are often too ready to label other people 'prisoners,' " Charles observes, unwittingly describing his own misconstructions to a tee.

Murdoch is that rare thing, a woman writer who is hard to classify as a "woman writer." She moves effortlessly between male and female points of view; if anything she seems more comfortable, more authoritative, in the male role. Many of her novels are written in the first person with a male narrator, and they are wholly convincing—to this female reader, at any rate. She is especially adept at depicting the male's method of coldly deciding which side his bread is buttered and acting accordingly, while at the same time dignifying his selfish decision with illusions of good intentions and right actions.

A Severed Head, one of Murdoch's early novels (later turned into a play by Murdoch and J. B. Priestley) is especially rich in such hypocrisies. Martin Lynch-Gibbon, a wine merchant and amateur historian (author of "Sir Eyre Coote and the Campaign of Wandewash"), shilly-shallies between his middle-aged wife Antonia—one of those glossy, avid women that populate Murdoch's fictional world—and his emotional young mistress, Georgie. He finds himself thrown off course by a sudden passion for the enigmatic Honor Klein, but though Martin no longer loves either Antonia or Georgie, he finds himself unable to let them go. He is quite capable of assessing the women dispassionately, taking note, for example, of "the great crystalline tears which [Antonia] used," while simultaneously endowing his own feelings for the two with a self-regarding nobility: "my old love for Antonia, so warm and radiant with golden human dignity, and . . . my love for Georgie, so tender and sensuous and gay."

All of Murdoch's "heroes" wallow in such self-deception, but not all to Martin's extreme degree, and some are quite conscious of their motives, like Jake Donoghue in *Under the Net*. "I was deeply moved," he states at one point. "Yet at the same time I took the thing with a grain of salt. I had often known myself to be moved in the past, and little had come of it." *Under the Net*, despite its serious foundations, is the most farcical of Murdoch's novels, and exhibits an earthiness which her later style, distilled and refined, comes close to losing. Much has been made of Murdoch's debt, in this early novel, to Beckett, but it is in fact more Wodehouse than Beckett, and a large portion of the plot—Sacred Sammy the bookie; the theft of Marvelous Mister Mars, the brilliant canine movie star; the Socialist

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rabble-rouser Lefty Todd proselytizing to toga-clad extras at the Bounty Belfounder film studios—is pure Wodehouse, and very funny. Though such broad farce is not a genre Murdoch was to pursue, a certain strain of it infuses all her work, notably *The Black Prince* and *The Sea, The Sea*, where the passive narrators are persecuted by friends and relatives, much like a couple of Bertie Woosters with no Jeeves to protect them.

Murdoch's comedy, though fine in its own right, is nevertheless kept always at the service of a serious theme. Murdoch is perhaps less a philosophical novelist than a religious one. Her main concern is with the death of Christian principles in the West and with the necessity of finding an alternative religious system to take their place. Through the characters who act as mouthpieces for her own thoughts, such as Brendan Craddock in *Henry and Cato* or Father Damien in *The Green Knight*, Murdoch reiterates fictionally what she has stated in her nonfiction and in interviews: that she believes neither in a personal God, nor an afterlife, nor in the divinity of Christ, but feels that Christianity nonetheless is still central, if only because it happens to be the particular and traditional form which worship has taken in her own country. "The fact is that to lose Christianity would be a most terrible thing," she has said. "The figure of Christ is so compelling. This is what we're so lucky to have."

In Murdoch's fiction, the characters who live in the greatest peril are not those who confront the possibility of evil, but those who exist in ignorance of any religious tradition, without the vocabulary or the frame of reference to create a spiritual life for themselves. The young artist Jessica Bird in *The Nice and the Good*, for example, was like most of her fellow students, "entirely outside Christianity. Not only had she never believed or worshipped, she had never been informed about the Bible stories or the doctrines of the Church in her home or school. . . . She was in fact an untainted pagan, although the word suggested a positivity which was not to be found in her life." This is a type that has become increasingly common in the thirty years since this novel was published, for in rejecting Christianity *in toto* we have rejected, along with it, the last two thousand years of our culture's moral, ethical, and mystical thought and are left with few building blocks toward a viable system of practical spirituality or ethics.

Contemporary philosophy has failed to fill the void. "Kant believed in Reason and Hegel believed in History," wrote Murdoch in her book *The Sovereignty of Good*. "Modern thinkers who believe in neither, but who remain within the tradition, are left with a denuded self whose only virtues are freedom, or at best sincerity, or, in the case of the British philosophers, an everyday reasonableness." Freedom she disposes of as being in most cases illusory, hence existentialism, in which she took an early interest, is finally "an unrealistic and over-optimistic doctrine and the purveyor of certain false values," in which "an unexamined sense of the strength of the machine is combined with an illusion of leaping out of it."

Original sin, though not in its literal Augustinian form, she accepts as a reality that twentieth-century intellectuals have denied to their peril. Of all modern thinkers only Freud, she believes, has presented "what might be called a doctrine of original sin." It is significant that in several of her novels one or more characters posit a Freudian explanation for unusual or destructive behavior. In *The Black Prince*, for example, both Francis Marloe and Bradley Pearson himself offer Freudian readings of Pearson's erratic conduct, and in *A Severed Head* the narrator, Martin, ventures an opinion that unacknowledged homosexual urges can explain his ambivalent attitude toward Palmer Anderson. With characteristic skill, Murdoch makes us understand that while these theories are convincing and at least partly true, they do not begin to approach the entire "truth." All theories, insofar as they are formulaic, are the property

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of "that sad crew of semi-educated theorizers who prefer any general blunted 'symbolic' explanation to the horror of confronting a unique human history." As the narrator of *The Philosopher's Pupil* states, "We are in fact far more randomly made, more full of rough contingent rubble, than art or vulgar psycho-analysis leads us to imagine. The language of sin may be more appropriate than that of science and as likely to 'cure.' "

Murdoch has declared her novels to be more Buddhist than Christian in outlook: Buddhism attracts her because it accepts the possibility of having religion without God, a certainty for which many of her characters, people left with Christian ideals but unable to believe in a personal God, are seeking. Tuan in the recent *Jackson's Dilemma* searches for evidence of the existence of "Religion without Mysticism, Mysticism without Religion"; Michael in *The Bell* helplessly states, "There is a God, but I do not believe in Him." Many of Murdoch's characters strive after some Christian-derived ideal of "good." Most fail, or achieve only a modest improvement; some, like the ex-priest Brendan Craddock in *Henry and Cato*, go further down the difficult path. Good, to Murdoch, is an end that we must seek; never mind that it is in all probability unattainable even by the saints.

What, then, she asks, is to be made "of the command 'be ye therefore perfect?' Would it not be more sensible to say 'Be ye therefore slightly improved?'" Improvement is certainly to be preferred to no improvement, but the search should not end there. In practical ethics, Murdoch sees "good" as the eradication of the self or the ego: "Goodness is connected with the attempt to see the unself." Murdoch's novels illustrate this credo over and over. In *The Green Knight*, the groping and unenlightened but well-meaning Bellamy seeks a life of contemplation in a monastery, while his wiser correspondent, Father Damien, urges him to forget about his own soul and do some unromantic and aesthetically unappealing social work at a local home for battered wives. And John Ducane in *The Nice and the Good*, trapped in a seaside cave and faced with almost certain death by drowning, is given a vision of the human ego as wholly ignoble, a greedy and rapacious rat.

> He thought, If I ever get out of here I will be no man's judge. Nothing is worth doing except to kill the little rat, not to judge, not to be superior, not to exercise power, not to seek, seek, seek. To love and to reconcile and to forgive, only this matters. All power is sin and all law is frailty. Love is the only justice. Forgiveness, reconciliation, not law.

Murdoch's characters, then, can be seen as being stationed at various points along a continuum between real evil—like Julius King in *A Fairly Honorable Defeat*—and some form of good, or enlightenment. One might predict that the bad characters, like Milton's Satan, would be more interesting and amusing than the good ones, and on the whole this is true: Julius, for example, who represents Satan in the scheme of the novel and plots to break up two happy ménages, often talks a good deal of sense and is far more vivid than his dim, dull opposite number Tallis Browne, who represents Christ in the struggle between good and evil.

Whatever the ethical value of dimness and passivity, they tend to be fatal to fiction. The virtuous Ann Peronett in *An Unofficial Rose*, who out of pure unselfish propriety turns her back on the possibility of happiness with the man she loves to offer herself to the brute she married, seems infuriating rather than admirable, and provides a soft center for what is otherwise a remarkably fine and entertaining novel. Fiction's real strength is in fact the depiction not of pure states of good and evil but of nuances between the two: hence by far the most vivid character in *A Fairly Honorable Defeat* is neither the demonic Julius nor the passive Tallis, nor even Morgan, who symbolizes the human soul torn between them, but a

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less symbolically loaded character, the sweet-natured homosexual Simon Foster, who survives Julius's machinations and keeps his lover not through any act of unusual nobility but simply by proving not quite as weak and malleable as the arrogant Julius had predicted. The dimness of Tallis is an artistic failure: Christ himself, after all, was not dim but invariably the most vibrant figure in the New Testament, as well as being the wittiest.

Murdoch's novels—and in particular the gloomy *Henry and Cato*, which reads like a mixture of *Brighton Rock*, *The Heart of the Matter*, and *The Power and the Glory*—sometimes resemble those of Graham Greene, with theological speculation breaking in, often obtrusively, upon a gripping narrative. Like Greene, Murdoch can take perfectly good characters and turn them into boring representations of "the good" or mouthpieces for her own theories. Edgar Demarnay in *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine*, for instance, begins as one of Murdoch's most wonderful creations, weeping cravenly and nagging the bereaved Monty Small for a relic of Monty's late wife, whom he had always worshipped. Halfway through the novel, however, the foolish, appealing Edgar disappears and the character becomes a mere repository for Murdoch's own pet views, his vivid and idiosyncratic dialogue disappearing to make way for Murdoch's distinctive ideolect:

> "Let it all go, Monty. The resentment and the jealousy and the reliving it all. Sophie is dead and you must *respect* her death, and that means not tearing away at a memory of her personality. Death changes our relation to people. Of course the relation itself lives on and goes on changing. But you must at least try to make it a good relation and not a rotten one. Sophie is dead and you are alive, and your duty is the same as any man's, to make yourself better."

Though this turning of real characters into symbolically-loaded stock figures mars Murdoch's work—at its worst it can infect her novels with the brittle pretentiousness of T. S. Eliot's *The Cocktail Party*—it is usually kept in control and made an organic part of the larger narrative. Murdoch's novels, especially the pre-1980 ones, hold together and hold up, while those of Graham Greene look, in retrospect, increasingly synthetic: while "entertainments" such as *This Gun for Hire* and *The Third Man* endure as classics of their genre, Greene's "serious" work, now that the rather gimmicky novelty of its style is novel no longer, appears forced and artificial.

Murdoch sees the contemplation of great art as a remedy for spiritual failure, and manages to incorporate this theme into almost all of her novels. In *The Nice and the Good* the self-delusions of the characters are exposed by Bronzino's uncompromising painting "Venus, Cupid, Folly and Time"; *Hamlet* infuses Bradley Pearson's consciousness in *The Black Prince*; in *An Unofficial Rose* a Tintoretto masterpiece restores and refreshes Hugh Peronett, while serving as a symbol of potential freedom for his son Randall. "The greatest art is 'impersonal' because it shows us the world, our world and not another one, with a clarity which startles and delights us simply because we are not used to looking at the real world at all," Murdoch has written. Art is valuable insofar as it is impersonal, insofar as it diverts the beholder from his "self." Dora Greenfield in *The Bell* goes to the National Gallery to cleanse her soul: "It occurred to her that here at last was something real and something perfect. . . . Here was something which her consciousness could not wretchedly devour, and by making it part of her fantasy make it worthless. . . . When the world had seemed to be subjective it had seemed to be without interest or value. But now there was something else in it after all."

Murdoch, then, parts company with Plato, of whom she otherwise considers herself a follower, on the role of art and the artist. "For both the collective and the individual salvation of the human race," she writes, "art is doubtless more important

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than philosophy, and literature most important of all. . . . It is the role of tragedy, and also of comedy, and of painting to show us suffering without a thrill and death without a consolation."

At the age of seventy-seven, Murdoch has just published a new novel, her twenty-sixth. She has often expressed her veneration for Shakespeare—like Charles Arrowby in *The Sea, The Sea*, she considers him not simply *primus inter pares* but in a class entirely of his own—and with *Jackson's Dilemma* she has clearly attempted to pay homage to Shakespeare, to produce a formally Shakespearean comedy: her *As You Like It* or *All's Well That Ends Well*.

The story begins with preparations for an eagerly awaited wedding. The great houses of Penndean and Hatting Hall have existed as neighbors for hundreds of years without any real connection between their families; now they are to be symbolically joined. Benet Barnell, the owner of Penndean, has befriended two sisters, Rosalind and Marian. Fond of both girls and of the young master of Hatting Hall, Edward Lannion, Benet has done some well-meant match making between Edward and Marian, and the two young people are now to be married.

Marian has decided to stay in London until the ceremony itself, and on the eve of the wedding Benet, Edward, and Rosalind are enjoying dinner together at Penndean with their circle of close friends: Mildred Smalden, a fey, nun-like woman who has been known to undergo visions before the Parthenon frieze in the British Library; Tuan (named of course for Lord Jim), a mysterious and vaguely spiritual young man, loved by Rosalind; and Owen Silbery, a society painter and very gay roué. The mood is celebratory, but toward the end of the evening a fateful message is pushed under the door: a letter from Marian saying that she cannot marry Edward.

The characters are then plunged into an extreme state of distraction which seems quite out of proportion to the actual event. Marian is nowhere to be found; Edward, too, disappears; Rosalind weeps inconsolably and is certain that Marian has taken her own life; Benet, the gloomy, philosophizing Jaques figure in the Shakespearean pattern, torments himself for having thoughtlessly made an inappropriate match. With a great deal of overwrought prose and dialogue, a scene of upheaval is set.

> "Won't you stay here? I'm not going. My dear child, *do stay*, please."
>
> "No, no, I know you want to be alone. I want to be alone too. I must go. It is all such a *nightmare*—"
>
> . . . "I will see you very soon. Perhaps you will find her, perhaps she will come to you—she would come to you, not to us—very soon everything may be put together, they will run to each other—it will all be—"
>
> Rosalind said, "No, she will not come, not to any of us ever again, she will never come."
>
> "Don't say that, Rosalind—we don't know—"
>
> "It's like witchcraft, it's like being transformed into quite a different thing—or like—like in *hell*."

The friends all seem frozen in a state of helpless inactivity; it is only Benet's enigmatic servant, Jackson, who takes action which eventually brings about a resolution. Jackson, however, is no Jeeves or Crichton but a supernatural, vaguely religious figure whose provenance is a mystery and who is likened in turn to Moses in the bulrushes, Caliban, Ariel, and the Fisher King. He appears to be undergoing some sort of redemptive suffering for an unknown crime, and has been handpicked for Benet by Benet's saintly uncle, Tim, who has been dead for several years. Benet, though he loved Uncle Tim dearly, resists Tim's inexplicable choice and is cool with Jackson.

Thanks to Jackson's efforts, the young people's lives are after much *Sturm und Drang* happily sorted out. Marian, it seems, had not been quite as chaste as everyone had thought and had had an affair with a young Australian some weeks before

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the planned wedding. The Australian, overcome with passion and despair at her impending marriage, drugged her and forced her to write the terrible letter. Eventually Marian admits to herself that she loves her Australian swain rather than Edward, and happily plans a life with him in Sydney. Edward, too, is not quite as heartbroken as he has appeared and goes off with the woman whom, it seems, he has always loved, the elegant widow Anna Dunarven. Rosalind (who, like her Shakespearean namesake, dresses like a boy) nabs her Tuan: he, it seems, has been unable to give love because of a gruesome family history dating back to the Holocaust, but is changed through the power of her love.

Unfortunately, the overall effect is less one of Shakespearean inclusivity than of mere silliness. Why were the mismatched couple together in the first place? One can see why Marian decided to marry Edward: it would be something to be the mistress of Hatting Hall. But why did Edward, who had never loved anyone but Anna, not propose to her? Why did he decide instead to marry a feckless girl he obviously didn't care much about and with whom he had little in common? And the various characters' reactions, in both their despair and their joy, are so extreme as to produce puzzlement in the reader. What effect is Murdoch aiming at? Is she trying, and failing, to make her characters realistic, or is she reaching for a stylized Forest of Arden madness? Critics have sometimes carped at Murdoch for lapses in verisimilitude. But verisimilitude in itself is not particularly important unless the author has set out to establish it as so: then, such lapses create false notes which ruin the novel's effect. Such is the case with *Jackson's Dilemma*, which sets up a more or less realistic situation and then, through stylistic and structural excesses, destroys it.

Thus *Jackson's Dilemma*'s happy ending, with the felicitous pairing-off of the various young people, is not so much a conceit of Shakespearean fancy as an artificial construction. Yet here it should be said that throughout her career Murdoch has tended to tack contrived happy endings onto even her darker novels; it is a device linked more to her philosophical convictions of guarded and limited optimism than to the actual lives of the characters, and achieves an accordingly false effect.

Through an earlier protagonist Murdoch has argued, convincingly, that "the novel is a comic form. Language is a comic form, and makes jokes in its sleep. God, if he existed, would laugh at His creation." But the forms of comedy are useless when forced upon a situation which is not, in its essence, comic. The mere pairing of couples does not make for a comic conclusion, or even a joyful one; there has got to be some sustained level of wit in the work as a whole to give the pattern meaning. This is sadly missing from *Jackson's Dilemma*. One hesitates to jump to conclusions and say that Dame Iris is past her prime, but the general falling-off in the level of her fiction over the last ten years would seem to indicate just that.

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Homer, Hopper & the critics

by Michael J. Lewis

What happens when a generation of art historians, schooled in the hagiography of modernism, turns its attention to art that is not modernist? To judge by the evidence of several recent exhibitions, they do well in certain limited channels, less well in others. In research and archival sleuthing, rigorous formal analysis, and use of social history, they are at their best. In appreciating the value or meaning of the art itself they are less certain, and are likely to turn to modernist criteria to validate art that they like. But in their understanding of American society and its commercial nature, and what this means for art, they are hopelessly at sea. And without their recognizing this, much of American art will remain in some fundamental way incomprehensible.

In the past two years New York has seen three major exhibitions of American realists. Presented at prestigious venues and bolstered by prodigious new research, these exhibitions have honored Edward Hopper,[1] the Ashcan School[2] (Robert Henri, John Sloan, George Luks, among others), and most recently Winslow Homer.[3] Taken together, these three exhibitions trace a pedigree of American realism from the Civil War into the 1960s. To art historians who have been trained to think in terms of one pedigree—that modernist continuum running from the Armory Show to Minimalism—these shows offer a kind of alternative lineage of American art.

Although they differ wildly in technique, vision, and even basic ability, these artists have in common certain fundamental experiences, above all a crucial period of seasoning as commercial illustrators. Of these, Winslow Homer is the most famous. As battlefield artist for *Harper's Weekly* during the Civil War, he scoured the front, making rough field sketches which he would work up into final drawings in his tent. These would be shipped by rail to New York where the magazine's art staff transferred the images to woodblocks. A grid was drawn over the drawing which was then cut up, the separate squares allocated for speed of execution to different woodblock cutters. Thus within a matter of days a Northern reader could look at relatively accurate

1 "Edward Hopper and the American Imagination" was on view at the Whitney Museum of American Art from June 22, 1995, to October 15.

2 "Metropolitan Lives: The Ashcan Artists and Their New York," was organized by the National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, where the show ran from November 17, 1995, through March 17, 1996. The exhibition reopened at the New-York Historial Society on May 1, 1996, and closed there on August 4.

3 "Winslow Homer" opened at the Metropolitan Museum of Art on June 20, 1996, and remains on view through September 22. The exhibition originated at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, where it ran from October 15, 1995, through January 28, 1996.

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scenes of battle from the South. Here, except for the speed of transmission, was the beginning of modern photojournalism as we know it.

Homer's artistic descendants were found in the circle of Ashcan painters (as so often, a term of abuse that became a badge of honor) that gathered around Robert Henri. Although he was not himself a newspaper illustrator, Henri's pupils—Sloan, Luks, Everett Shinn, and William Glackens—all worked during the 1890s for the dailies of Philadelphia, that perennial center of American realism. This was the golden age of the newspaper artist, that brief period when photoengraving made possible the overnight printing of sketches, but before the photographic half-tone became widely available. It was grueling training, forcing artists to sketch swiftly and tersely, as they hurried from public rally to courtroom to fire, working to meet absolutely rigid deadlines. Here was a practical equivalent to the stressful timed *esquisse* of the French Ecole des Beaux Arts. And in time each man developed his speciality, the Falstaffian Luks cultivating scenes of action and violence, while the elegant but plodding Sloan was saved for the Sunday *feuilleton* sections. When these men came to Henri, then teaching in Thomas Eakins's old slot at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, they were already mature commercial illustrators who craved the stuff of more serious art.

Hopper was in some sense the last of the Ashcan painters, with whom he identified himself when he moved to the Washington Square neighborhood in 1910. He too thrived as an illustrator, earning handsomely from advertisements, posters, and magazine illustrations. Not until the 1920s, after Hopper turned forty, did he commence the spacious, melancholy oils which established his reputation and which formed the subject of the Whitney show.

In each of these instances, training in commercial illustration permanently affected the artist's consciousness, etched as it were into his bones. It shaped the way each conceived of composition and form; in large measure it accounts for their strengths, as well as their abundant weaknesses. Illustration is of course subject to different rules than those that govern easel painting. The drawings had to be made so they would translate into black and white. They had to be strong enough to read well when executed in miniature format. And, as Homer learned, they had to be made to survive execution by hacks. In short, legibility was the highest virtue. Such pressures promoted a certain kind of art: images containing strong action, vivid compositions with lively silhouettes that commanded attention and whose action unfolded in large and broad gestures. The illustrator learns the lesson that every stage actor soon learns: it is not enough to make subtle movements of the eyebrows for those in the good seats; one must make large movements that can be read in the farthest rows.

In the making of these broad gestures the Ashcan artists were supreme. Luks's celebrated *The Wrestlers* is just the sort of arresting composition they prized, with its extraordinary central figure portrayed upside down and heroically foreshortened, *in extremis*, as he is pinned to the mat. Like the photojournalist, Luks knew how to maximimize the amount of visual energy in an image. George Bellows learned much from Luks, as his boxing paintings show. In his *Stag at Sharkey's*, two clinching boxers and a referee are brought violently together to form a dynamic pyramid, a quivering mass of colliding heads and gloves, a kind of flattened *Laocoön*. Never was boxing rendered in such classical terms, and seldom did the classical pyramid contain so much kinetic energy.

Hopper, likewise, seems to have learned more from his commercial stint than from his years in Paris. Even more than his Ashcan predecessors, he had a gift for the placement of figures in space, which he located in his canvases with absolute mastery. Hopper had an instinct for the making of memorable compositions which haunt in

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much the same way a commercial jingle does. Surely this is the reason why Hopper himself has become a lucrative commercial commodity, generating more calendars, posters, postcards, and lumbering coffee-table portfolios than any other American artist. Ironically, this also accounts for his chief weakness, his notorious sloppiness in execution. In the actual manipulation of paint on canvas, Hopper is often slapdash. To paraphrase James Thurber, his works lost something in the original. He is one of those artists whose paintings often suffer from close study.

In this respect he is unlike Homer, with whom it is always rewarding to approach the canvas and look closely at a square inch of painting in isolation. Homer is that *rara avis* in the history of art, the draftsman who takes flight, becoming a sensual colorist. Like Hopper, he had an unerring eye for the striking composition, the finest of which, once seen, are unforgettable. Early in his wartime career, Homer learned the knack of locating a figure dramatically against the horizon line. In one of his earliest oil canvases, *Defiance: Inviting a Shot Before Petersburg*, a cocky rebel soldier makes himself a target by standing in silhouette atop a ridge, daring the snipers to do their worst. Two decades later, Homer was using the same device: in *The Life Line* a half-drowned woman is placed in peril at the center of the canvas, suspended above choppy waves on a rescue seat which in turn hangs from a taut cable that disappears at either edge of the frame. Meanwhile, her scarlet scarf billows to mask the face of her rescuer. But while the vivid local colors showed a characteristic High Victorian palette, particularly the splash of alizarin crimson of the scarf, Homer was still conceiving his work in terms of mass and tone. The monochrome etching he made of the painting—one of his finest graphic works—sacrifices the color while losing none of the intensity of the original. Once again Homer, even as a brilliant colorist, showed how little his compositions depended on color for their force.

Here, then, we have a collection of artists whose careers were launched by commercial illustration, and who retained its lessons, in various ways, to their deaths. How is this theme treated in these three exhibitions? The Ashcan School exhibition, called "Metropolitan Lives," does not do so badly. Its curators were chiefly interested in the Ashcan painters as keen observers of modern life, and they make much out of the newspaper background of the artists. This is not entirely good news; as Mario Naves pointed out recently in these pages, the curators of the show seem enthusiastic about every aspect of the Ashcan painters except their art.[4] While Sloan and his friends worked ambitiously to transform themselves from newspaper reporters to artists, the exhibit reverses the process, looking at them solely as social observers, reporters who happened to use brushes. Of course, for the social historian, a bad painting is as valuable a document as a good one. For the historian of art, though, the distinction ought to be made.

The treatment of Hopper is even worse. For the historians of American art, for whom the story of this century is the triumph of modernism—the victory of revolutionary abstraction over representational art—realists have always posed a problem of interpretation. Of course, one cannot have revolutionaries without reactionaries, and realists are useful didactically as fixed stars, celestial markers against which to chart the progress of the avant-garde. Hence the passing references in the survey literature to regionalists such as Grant Wood, Thomas Hart Benton, or Andrew Wyeth. But Hopper presented a special problem to art historians who found they enjoyed his lonely urban interiors as much as they despised Wood's pastoral reveries. This forced them into rhetorical gymnastics in order to claim Hopper as a modernist even as they excluded the regionalists.

4 See the review by Mario Naves, "Glackens, Sloan & friends: the Ashcan artists' New York," in *The New Criterion* (June 1996).

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Part of the strategy was provided by the venerable historian H. W. Janson, who had once feuded with Grant Wood when both taught at the University of Iowa. (Janson had taken his students on an unauthorized trip to a Picasso exhibit, for which he was temporarily suspended, an event which he blamed on Wood.) In 1946 Janson published an article on Wood and Benton in the *Magazine of Art* where he proclaimed that "Many of the paintings officially approved by the Nazis recall the works of the regionalists in this country." This equation of the regionalists with fascism was devastating. It stuck to the regionalists (and lingers yet in the literature), although it is now clear that the pro-labor, anti-capital stance of the regionalists was actually much closer to that of the urban social realists, against whom they are routinely, and unfavorably, juxtaposed.

Hopper, however, was never judged harshly for his failure to turn abstract after 1940, and he won a kind of art-historical indulgence for his realism. He would be claimed as a modernist not for his technique but for his subject matter: secretaries in stark offices at night, glum retirees on porch steps, and nude women in motel rooms. If this was not the modernism of Picasso, at least it was the modernism of Freud. In the end he would be accepted as a visionary who depicted the alienation of modern life. This tendency to make a modernist out of the realist has created a peculiar mythology about Hopper, the literature on whom is like nothing so much as a protracted and humorless psychoanalysis.

If "Metropolitan Lives" showed the Ashcan paintings only for their larger context, the Whitney exhibition did something even more remarkable: it presented Hopper's paintings entirely out of context. Instead of producing the conventional modern catalogue, half scholarship and half coffee-table pictorial, the Whitney used Hopper as an excuse on which to hang an odd collection of bits of creative writing. *Edward Hopper and the American Imagination* is a rambling collection of poems, essays, and hard-boiled short stories, all "inspired," we are told, by Hopper's gritty realism. The invited authors (most of whom had written their pieces before the catalogue was conceived) include such figures as Norman Mailer, although none of the pieces enlighten us very much about Hopper, other than the rather obvious conclusions that his subjects are lonely and have problems. While this "creative" catalogue surely seemed to the museum to be a bold and daring stroke, in another sense it can be taken as a failure of nerve, an insecurity about putting Hopper forward as an artist whose work has its own intrinsic interest as art. (Perhaps the Whitney felt that it had done enough for Hopper scholarship since it had just published its comprehensive *catalogue raisonné* of his work.)

The same ambivalence about the meaning of Hopper runs through the writings of Gail Levin, who has made a one-woman cottage industry out of Hopper, with seven books. Her *Edward Hopper: An Intimate Biography* in some sense is the real companion volume to the Whitney exhibit, with which its publication was timed.[5] Levin clearly has no interest in Hopper's commercial years. She tells us repeatedly that he was disgusted with having to work as an illustrator, and even resented his own success, although she presents little evidence for this. In fact, the first quarter of the book exists only to sketch out Hopper's personality, a rather overwrought depiction of an inhibited and deeply repressed Yankee. Not until page 146, when Hopper's future wife appears, does Levin hit her stride. Josephine Nivison was a painter herself, and had studied briefly with Henri, although she is remembered now as Hopper's chief model. One wonders if the sense of déjà vu so often evoked by Hopper is due in part to this familiar figure who haunts so many of his canvases.

Jo looms large in Levin's account, where

5 *Edward Hopper: An Intimate Biography*, by Gail Levin; Knopf, 678 pages, $35.

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she is treated as "the intellectual peer and fellow painter who both stimulated and challenged her more gifted colleague." She comes across vividly and forcefully, unfortunately more vividly than Hopper himself, for this account owes much to her pungent diaries. Jo was fiercely competitive with her husband, and her diaries frequently boil over with envy. A glance at the index tells us what we are in for: under Jo we find eighteen references to "resentment at lack of recognition" and another sixteen to "Edward's negative attitudes and actions."

To be fair, Levin faces a insoluble dilemma. On the one hand, feminist ideology suggests that Jo be treated as a victim, whose art was undervalued because she was a woman. On the other hand, Levin does not want to call into question the importance of Hopper's own art. (One suspects she is secretly relieved that so little of Jo's work survives, although she makes the loss seem like a cultural calamity of the highest order.) In the end, Levin has it both ways; she argues that it is precisely Hopper's abusive and tense relationship with Jo that turned him into a great painter, which makes Jo his "silenced collaborator." This is rather a peculiar argument. It is not clear how an abusive relationship makes her a collaborator, any more than the boss who harasses you by day is the coauthor of the anguished novel you write at night. There is a difference between an influence and a collaborator.

In the end, *An Intimate Biography* suffers from too much intimacy, intimacy of the one-sided sort, that is. Levin works heroically to marshall the enormous amount of manuscript materials but is unable to turn them into the arc of a vivid narrative. Instead of the rising and falling action of a great story, there are the petty day-to-day worries of a self-absorbed diary. Levin is very good at showing you what was going on in the Hopper household when he was painting his masterpiece *Nighthawks*, but this should open up a thoughtful exploration of that haunting painting; instead, the account of apartment life is presented as if it somehow explained the painting. The book putters through the marriage, detailing squabbles and chronicling painting campaigns in microscopic detail, while constantly reiterating what one already knows from the paintings themselves: that Hopper was fascinated by women in lonely introversion. After having finished his stint in the feminist docket, Levin's Hopper emerges a rather diminished figure, which is surely not her intention.

Of all these artists, Winslow Homer is given the least tendentious treatment, perhaps because as a nineteenth-century figure he requires no apology for not being a modernist. Homer, like some of America's finest painters (one thinks of John Singleton Copley) was essentially an autodidact. Neither his early training as an engraver nor the year spent in Paris seems to have influenced him as much as what he learned working for *Harper's*. As for most of his generation, the Civil War was his chief formative experience. After the war he commenced painting the bucolic scenes, such as *Snap the Whip*, for which he soon won attention and for which he is still known. But during the Eighties he found his principal subject in the drama of man against nature. There now emerged one of Homer's most characteristic traits, his interest in depicting a heavy mass under the influence of an opposing force. Homer had an uncanny power of conveying the exact degree of heft and tension in a mass—a boat in a heaving swell, a deer pushing through a lake. The quintessential Homer picture, such as *The Herring Net*, depicts an object in dynamic tension: a boat straining under the weight of deployed nets on one side, offset by the splayed leaning bodies of crewmen on the other side. This was very different than the qualities his contemporaries sought, the condition of shimmering weightlessness aspired to in the work of George Inness, for example, or Thomas Wilmer Dewing.

Homer loved the challenge of depicting an object subjected to the simultaneous ac-

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tion of different kinds of force, such as his images of the stout women of Tynemouth that he admired during his 1882 visit to England, and whom he portrayed as Amazons, straining with a loaded basket on one hand and a skirt billowing like a full rigged ship, standing up to gravity and wind alike. By the early 1880s Homer's artistic language was complete, an art of palpable masses and vital forces, and purged of distraction and picturesque incident. In this respect Homer should be placed with those other great figures of the age, such as the architect H. H. Richardson and the sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens, who likewise sought a heroic simplification of Victorian clutter.

In later years Homer turned reclusive, withdrawing to his eirie in Prout's Neck, Maine, building a simple shingled studio whose panoramic veranda was less a porch than the bridge of a ship. Increasingly, the drama of conflict in his work turned elemental. The specifics of narrative vanished as his figures lost their individual features to become archetypes. Naturally, living ten miles from town, Homer no longer had ready models. Perhaps he used the small wooden mannequins he had brought back from England, arranging their jointed limbs to make the rather generalized figures of his later works, marionettes to be jostled about by forces beyond their control. In his final decade, Homer's theme of the struggle of life reached its sublime limits. The late tragic seascapes show waves colliding with the exposed jetties of Prout's Neck, and can be read as painted versions of the riddle of the irresistible force and the immovable object. They are Homer's finest works of oil on canvas. Here was the last fruit of the Hudson River School tradition, which found in the natural landscape profound moral lessons, although in Homer's late works the transcendentalism of Emerson lost its Christian moorings to become a kind of pagan pantheism.

This story is told by "Winslow Homer" with freshness and vitality. The wall texts refrain from political moralizing, while the intelligent catalogue also resists the temptation to use the paintings as points of departure for social history. Given the state of art-history criticism today (and given Homer's solitary bachelorhood), the absence of psychosexual interpretation is astonishing. In fact, the book makes it all the way to page 379 before revealing that the ravenous sharks of Homer's *The Gulf Stream* can be read as "*vagina dentata*, the toothed sexual organ that so forcefully expressed the male fear of female sexual aggression." By not applying a political agenda to the works, the exhibition magnifies Homer and shows why he continues to remain a central figure in American art.

Homer rose above his inadequate training by building on the strengths of his commercial career. He alone, of the artists in these three exhibitions, successfully completed the transition from illustration to high art. This was rather different than the path taken by another commercial artist, Andy Warhol, who was to claim illustration *as* high art. But even Warhol shows the centrality of the commercial world to American art. There runs through these lives a strand of American art history that often goes ignored: that persistent tension between an artist's own aspirations and the pressures of a relentlessly commercial society. This tension goes much further in explaining the work of these three generations of American realists than the theoretical developments of French painting, against which they are invariably measured.

Any art is inevitably stamped by the values and habits of the society that creates and sustains it. And American art is marinated in the commercial nature of the society that supports it, which has always placed certain obligations on the American artist: the need to compete and to win popular patronage, to court a mass audience in the absence of an informed and elite patronage, and to make lucid, legible images for a highly utilitarian and moralistic society that is annoyed by ambiguity. This is as true of architecture as of painting.

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America's most distinctive architects are those who created vivid commercial imagery—the eccentric Victorian banks by Philadelphia architect Frank Furness, or the streamlined contours of Raymond Hood's skyscrapers. Of the principal factors that shaped modern European art over the past few centuries—the role of official patronage, the authority of the academy, and the importance of theoretical ideas—none were operative in America.

And yet perhaps nowhere is art history more helpless than when dealing with the world of commerce and trade. By temperament and training the art historian thinks of institutions and intellectual ideas, and not of commercial forces. The consequence of this is a chronic tendency to overvalue the force of manifestos and theory and to undervalue the effect of business. In architecture this is especially egregious. Thus students learn that modern architecture triumphed in America after Henry Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson introduced the International Style in their famous 1932 exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art. The implication is that the new style vanquished the wildly successful commercial architecture of the previous decade. But it was not Hitchcock's and Johnson's jibes at the funny rooflines of Art Deco skyscrapers that did them in. It was rather the collapse of private finance after 1929 which destroyed large-scale commercial building, creating a vacuum into which moved the theoretical modernism of Europe, a modernism fundamentally hostile to capitalism and based instead on governmental patronage, and whose characteristic building type was not the skyscraper but the social housing block. The Empire State Building was discredited not by the Zeppelin mooring mast at its summit but by the apple peddlers huddled around its base. And yet the art world persists in believing in the power of its exhibitions to change the world.

For the art world, there are only two possible responses to the idea of art being subject to commercial forces, either to ignore it or to regard the prospect with diamond-hard hostility. The fundamental assumption is that competition is intrinsically unhealthy and has a corrupting influence on art, and that it is the goal of the artist to be as removed as possible from the world. To the extent that he is forced to compete, his art is seen as compromised. The tyranny of popular taste, though, is held up to be the enemy of art, as if there could be no such thing as a tyranny of institutional taste. To suggest that competition might serve to discipline an artist, and challenge him to make his pictorial ideas stronger and more coherent, is to invite ridicule, or worse. This explains why the debate about the fate of the pictorial arts is endlessly cast in terms of government and institutional funding, and so little is said about private patronage. And yet perhaps it is only through a renewal of the vitality and confidence of private patronage that the current self-absorption of the American art world can be broken.

Homer shows that commercial forces do not rule out the making of great art. And Hopper and the Ashcan School display an art that, if perhaps not great, was often very good on its own terms, regardless of its political or pyschological merits. Between these artists is a broader story of American art waiting to be told, for which these exhibits have offered up some crucial building blocks. Yet historians, nourished on the founding myths of modernism, are still trying to fit these figures into the old scheme. And somehow the viewer is given the impression that they would have somehow all have been better artists if they had just spent more time in Paris, learning from the French how to paint.

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Two poems by Jules Laforgue

translated & with an introduction by Louis Simpson

Jules Laforgue (1860–1887) was born in Montevideo, Uruguay, on August 16, the second son of Charles and Pauline Lacolley Laforgue. The poet's father was a native of Tarbes, France; Jules's mother was the daughter of a French bootmaker and former legionnaire.

As a young man, Jules studied philosophy and rhetoric. His first poems appeared in little magazines in Tarbes and Toulouse. One was a "Song of Death," the other a dialogue between a son and his father about having to choose an occupation. Laforgue submitted poems and stories to Paul Bourget for criticism and worked as an assistant to Charles Ephrussi, an art historian and editor. On the recommendation of Bourget and Ephrussi he was appointed "reader" to the Empress Augusta of Germany and traveled with the court to Berlin.

In later years, Laforgue traveled on his own to see exhibitions of paintings and wrote "chronicles" for Ephrussi's *Gazette des Beaux Arts*. We are told that he was "romantically involved with 'R.,' enigmatic personage attached to Court." In 1885 he published *Les Complaintes de Jules Laforgue*.

T. S. Eliot said that he traced his beginnings as a poet to two influences, the later Elizabethans and the poems of Laforgue. He said that Laforgue spoke to his generation more intimately than Baudelaire seemed to do, and he ranked Laforgue with Donne and Baudelaire as "the inventor of an attitude, a system of feeling or of morals." Some of Eliot's early poems, notably "Portrait of a Lady" and "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," are modeled on Laforgue's "complaints."

Laforgue is important in the literature of English-speaking countries, for the poems Eliot based on Laforgue have been widely imitated. But the French do not make much of Laforgue. In the years immediately following his death his reputation stood high among readers of poetry in France, but this did not last. Scholars and critics did not write about him—he was "marginalized" as academic scholars and critics say.

Laforgue's subject matter was original. In "Légende," translated below, a man tells of a visit to a woman friend who has stayed at a seaside resort beyond the season. She confides that she has had an affair and the man has left her. He commiserates with her and attempts to renew their former intimacy, but she rejects his advances—men, she says, are all alike. Writing about such common experiences was all too different for scholars and critics—it broke with tradition. But for a young American in the 1920s, Laforgue's poetry was wonderfully innovative: it was "modern." As the critic Malcolm Cowley said of reading Laforgue during that period, "We were impressed by his subject matter . . . we were young and yearning, and we found it exciting to read a poet who regarded adolescence as a time of life that deserved as much serious attention as any other time."

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Autre complainte

DE LORD PIERROT

Celle qui doit me mettre au courant de la Femme!
Nous lui dirons d'abord, de mon air le moins froid:
"La somme des angles d'un triangle, chère âme,
"Est égale à deux droits."

Et si ce cri lui part: "Dieu de Dieu! que je t'aime!"
—"Dieu reconnaîtra les siens." Ou piquée au vif:
—"Mes claviers ont du coeur, tu seras mon seul thème."
Moi: "Tout est relatif."

De tous ses yeux, alors! se sentant trop banale:
"Ah! tu ne m'aimes pas; tant d'autres sont jaloux!"
Et moi d'un oeil qui vers l'Inconscient s'emballe:
"Merci, pas mal; et vous?"

—"Jouons au plus fidèle!"—"A quoi bon, ô Nature!"
"Autant à qui perd gagne!" Alors, autre couplet:
—"Ah! tu te lasseras le premier, j'en suis sûre . . ."
"Après vous, s'il vous plaît."

Enfin, si, par un soir, elle meurt dans mes livres,
Douce; feignant de n'en pas croire encor mes yeux,
J'aurai un: "Ah çà, mais, nous avions De Quoi vivre!
"C'était donc sérieux?"

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Another complaint

OF LORD PIERROT

The one who keeps me informed how a woman feels,
I shall say to her first, with my least frigid air,
"The sum of the angles of a triangle equals
Two right angles, my dear."

And if this cry escapes her: "God, how I love you!"
"God rewards his own." Or sadly contemplative:
"Keyboards have a heart. My theme is always of you."
I: "All is relative."

With blazing eyes, aware of being tedious:
"Ah, you don't love me! But so many others do!"
I with an eye racing toward the Unconscious:
"Well enough, thanks. And you?"

"Let's see which can be more faithful." "What's the idea?"
"The one who loses wins." Then another couplet:
"Ah, you would be the first to grow tired, I swear . . ."
"Go ahead. Place your bet."

Finally, still pretending that I don't believe,
If one evening she should die, and not make a fuss,
I shall say, "How so? We had what it takes to live!
Then it was serious?"

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Légende

Armorial d'anémie!
Psautier d'automne!
Offertoire de tout mon ciboire de bonheur et de génie
À cette hostie si féminine,
Et si petite toux sèche maligne,
Qu'on voit aux jours déserts, en inconnue,
Sertie en de cendreuses toilettes qui sentent déjà l'hiver,
Se fuir le long des cris surhumains de la Mer.

Grandes amours, oh! qu'est-ce encor? . . .

En tout cas, des lèvres sans façon,
Des lèvres déflorées,
Et quoique mortes aux chansons,
Apres encore à la curée.
Mais les yeux d'une âme qui s'est bel et bien cloîtrée.
Enfin, voici qu'elle m'honore de ses confidences.
J'en souffre plus qu'elle ne pense.

—"Mais, chère perdue, comment votre esprit éclairé
Et le stylet d'acier de vos yeux infaillibles,
N'ont-ils pas su percer à jour la mise en frais
De cet économique et passager bellâtre?"

—"Il vient le premier; j'étais seule près de l'âtre;
Son cheval attaché à la grille
Hennissait en désespéré . . ."

—"C'est touchant (pauvre fille)
Et puis après?
Oh! regardez, là-bas, cet épilogue sous couleur de couchant;
Et puis, vrai,
Remarquez que dès l'automne, l'automne!
Les casinos,
Qu'on abandonne
Remisent leur piano;
Hier l'orchestre attaqua

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Legend

Armorial of anemia!
Psalter of autumn!
Offering my genius and luck, the full ciborium,
To that so feminine hostess
And the dry, malignant cough
You visit on empty days, at an obscure address,
Bent over the ashes of her wardrobe as winter approaches,
Escaping the reach of the sea's superhuman cries.

Great loves, where are they now?

They were simple in any case:
Lips that needed no introduction,
Though the song is dead and gone
Still eager for the chase.
But the eyes of a beautiful, well cloistered soul.
Finally, she is taking me into her confidence.
It is making me suffer more than she can guess.

"But, my poor dear, a person of your intelligence
And your eyes that can cut like steel,
How could they not see through the pretense
Of an opportunist, a goodlooking heel?"

"He was the first. I was alone, over there.
His horse, tied up at the gate,
Was whinnying with despair."

"Poor girl, that's touching!
And then?
Oh, look at that epilogue disguised as a sunset!
Then, it's the custom,
At the first touch of autumn . . . autumn!
The casinos
That have been abandoned
Put away their pianos.
Yesterday the orchestra

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Sa dernière polka,
Hier la dernière fanfare
Sanglotait vers les gares . . .”

(Oh! comme elle est maigrie!
Que va-elle devenir?
Durcissez, durcissez,
Vous, caillots de souvenir!)

—“Allons, les poteaux télégraphiques
Dans les grisailles de l’exil
Vous serviront de pleureuses de funérailles;
Moi, c’est la saison qui veut que je m’en aille,
Voici l’hiver qui vient.
Ainsi soit-il.
Ah! soignez-vous! Portez-vous bien.

Assez! assez!
C’est toi qui as commencé!

Tais-toi! Vos moindres clins d’yeux sont des parjures.
Laisse! Avec vous autres rien ne dure.
Va, je te l’assure,
Si je t’aimais, ce serait par gageure.

Tais-toi! tais-toi!
On n’aime qu’une fois!”

Ah! voici que l’on compte enfin avec Moi!

Ah! ce n’est plus l’automne, alors,
Ce n’est plus l’exil.
C’est la douceur des légendes, de l’âge d’or,
Des légendes des Antigones,
Douceur qui fait qu’on se demande:
“Quand donc cela se passait-il?”

C’est des légendes, c’est des gammes perlées,
Qu’on m’a tout enfant enseignées.
Oh! rien, vous dis-je, des estampes,

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Attacked its last polka.
Yesterday the last fanfare
Went sobbing to the stations. . . ."

(Oh, how thin she has grown!
What will become of her?
You clots of memory,
Harden, be as hard as stone!)

"Come now! The telegraph poles
In the graynesses of exile
Will serve you as mourners at funerals.
As for me, it is the season that wants me to go.
Winter will soon be here.
Then so be it.
Ah, take care of yourself! Take care.

Enough, enough!
You are the one who started it!

Don't speak! The slightest blink of your eyes is a lie.
Leave off! With all of you nothing is sure.
Go! If I loved you, I swear
It would have to be on a bet.

Be quiet! Be quiet!
One loves only once!"

And that is how they settle my accounts!

Ah, then it is no longer autumn
Or exile, but the sweetness
Of legends, once more the age of gold . . .
Legends about Antigones,
A sweetness that makes one wonder,
"Now when did that take place?"

It is legendary, like the stories I was told,
All the pearls of the nursery.
Oh, I tell you, in none of the pictures

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Les bêtes de la terre et les oiseaux du ciel
Enguirlandant les majuscules d'un Missel,
Il n'y a pas là tant de quoi saigner.

Saigner? moi pétri du plus pur limon de Cybèle!
Moi qui lui eusse été dans tout l'art des Adams
Des Edens aussi hyperboliquement fidèle
Que l'est le Soleil chaque soir envers l'Occident! . . .

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Of birds of the sky and animals
In the Missal engarlanding the capitals
Is there anything that can make you bleed like this.

Bleed? I am covered in the pure mud of Cybele!
I who would have been, with all the art of Adams
In Edens, as true to her, speaking in hyperbole,
As the sun every evening to the West.

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Poems *by Frederick Morgan, Daniel Mark Epstein & Elizabeth Spires*

The return

I waited there, outside of Time,
until my time should come.
You didn't think about me much—
it was enough for you to clutch
those brighter trophies you had won.

But now I'm here in my full being—
naked, brutish, plain as day.
What can you say to those you love
except, there's one you more than love
who must now have her way?

—Frederick Morgan

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In transit

I see you clearly now, dear wandering friend,
on your road to nowhere pausing at this scene:
a tiny town, four or five houses only,
clustered along the shore of a frozen lake
watched over by the white church from its hill.
It's old New England, it must be Christmas Eve,
the ground is covered deep and white with snow—
outside the Inn three carolers are singing
all bundled warm against the frosty night,
but folks are mostly home eating their suppers
while the horses snort and steam in the warm barns.

You stand there in white cloak and hood, apart,
on drifted snow which none but you has tracked:
the stars are out, the air is biting cold.
With smiling face you recognize the scene,
rejoicing—but have no wish to possess it.
Detached, ironic, ready now to leave,
you linger long enough for one last look
at two plump children tumbling on the ice.

—Frederick Morgan

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The clock

The boy had an odd dream on Christmas Eve.
He was floating above the town in the old hall clock,
now changed into a boat. The moon was up.
A being like himself sat at his side.

His house left far behind, the objects in it
took on with distance strange lives of their own,
secretive and severe. He sensed them there,
holding among themselves dark conversation.

Now there were fields below him, cloaked in white,
with here and there a barn or naked tree.
In burrows deep beneath the snow, he knew,
the speechless animals were warmly bundled.

His double waved a hand, and all at once
the sun blazed out full strength and the world was changed!
A tropic greenness overspread the land,
dotted with fruit trees and bright-blooming flowers.

Behind the beauty, though, a malice lurked—
a hint, it seemed to him, of something shrouded,
not yet revealed, but charged with pain and loss.
Seized with a sudden grief he cried out loud

and saw his semblance shrivel into smoke
as the clock rolled over, dropping him down down
through alternations of the moon and sun
to a place of shadows and ambiguous voices . . .

When he awoke—in safety?—it was Christmas.

—Frederick Morgan

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The Traveler's calendar

Dawn opens the accordion of façades,
Formstone and striped awnings of a street
Robber Barons paved to lure the drones
Hived in textile mills along the Falls
A hundred years ago.
In my corner room
With a view of row-house cornices and
The ruined forest on the hill beyond
I keep no clock or mirror.
I want no ticking image to remind
My muse of Time's progress on this front,
The dial of minutes or my quotidian face.
Nothing temporal excites this place
But daylight, nightfall and the creeping dust,
Metamorphic wind against the glass—
And this eternal Traveler's calendar,
Months adorned by Currier & Ives.

Faithful as Christmas, the agent of doom
Sends me this quaint scroll from Connecticut.
You know the type: a paper monument
To Mark Twain's America, the cake-tin
Rococo sweetness of the Gilded Age.
January snow, the horse-drawn sleigh
Leaving the fields trackless, immaculate;
Skaters testing ice on the mill pond;
Children chasing butterflies in May.
If there is a naval battle in July,
You may be sure it happened long ago
When patriots died gladly for their land.
And heavenly smoke-billows from the cannons
Mingle with clouds to hide the fire and gore.
Always a merry steeplechase in spring,
Always the summer sailing on the Bay,

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Cloudless, stormless, happy mirror of blue!
Farmhouses in the lusty light of morning,
Twilight stealing the green hills away;
The October perfection of still life—
Grapes and apples light cannot resist
Touching with silver fingers. Always
The glorious landscape larger than the man,
The boy forever fishing the mountain stream,
Innocent, proud, beloved.
America!
Who could forgive or forget your promises,
America as it only could exist
In dreams of men who toiled to barter dreams
For a row-house mortgage, insurance premiums?
Humanity was lost in your vast mood—
A mood-mountain, longed-for, uncertain—
A troubled child that could not come to good,
His passions buried deep under the mountain.
America, who can forgive or forget you?
I revisit the past, I can and I cannot.
Our landscape is stricken, the waterways
Poisoned with chemicals I cannot name,
Our sunsets freaked and stained with iodine.
Nothing looks the same but the pure flame
Of sun at noon. I mourn what was never mine.
The Hartford agent wants to sell me "Life"
For what it's worth to him and my family.
His calendar's a subtle tug at my sleeve,
Or not so subtle, now that I study it.
As if the color plates were not enough
To signify the imminence of Heaven,
Here come the phases of the moon:
January frames an infant's face,
The crescent moon of March a boy of ten
Who, in flowering June, is a young man,
Grey in August, white-haired in November,
Dimples worn to trenches in his cheeks.
Death has made my calendar a mirror,

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Flashing the twelve disciples of long life!
Then to remind me of the odds against it,
Death, the engraver, shows me a full moon
Like life in its luminous moment of glory,
Star-crowned, or cloud-adorned, while nearby
Lurks the black mouth of the new moon, saying:

"O live for the glory of the round of light
Crowned by stars in July, or cloud-haunted
In April; but bear in mind the black circle
Of the new moon sailing stealthily among
Your gaudy planets and constellations.
I am the dark round period that waits
Each day for the end of your sentence."

—*Daniel Mark Epstein*

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Equinox at Newport Farms

Winter deceived us. Now the March wind
Heckles the weatherboarding of the barn,
Drives the weathercock out of his mind.
Poor counterfeit! He can't tell North from South
Or night from day now they are equal and
The lamb's head is in the lion's mouth.

A heron or a heron's ghost in the mist
Wades the marsh, hieratic, Egyptian,
An elegant, high-stepping egoist
With the rare balance to stand alone
In cross winds, still as a bird of iron:
An emblem of long life, so I've heard.

Yet, pinned to the cupola, that painted bird,
Wind-drunk, sun-blind, man-made,
Will outlast him—and me, too, I'm afraid—
An emblem of human thought awhirl upon
Its axis, fanning the compass for direction
While the world ponders, turning in precession
Of the equinoxes, framing an axial space
Like the veering spindle of a spinning top.

Winter deceived us, making us embrace
The long darkness, the hopeless horoscope.
Now something about this vernal equinox
Piques my Libra nature, my need to balance
Future darkness against the daily light.

Neither old nor young at forty-six
I study the hunting patience of the herons,
The mad persistence of the weathercocks . . .

What days will come to equal the coming night?

—Daniel Mark Epstein

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"In heaven it is always autumn"

—John Donne

In heaven it is always autumn. The leaves are always near
to falling there but never fall, and pairs of souls out walking
heaven's paths no longer feel the weight of years upon them.
Safe in heaven's calm, they take each other's arm,
the light shining through them, all joy and terror gone.
But we are far from heaven here, in a garden ragged and unkept
as Eden would be with the walls knocked down, the paths littered
with the unswept leaves of many years, bright keepsakes
for children of the Fall. The light is gold, the sun pulling
the long shadow soul out of each thing, disclosing an outcome.
The last roses of the year nod their frail heads,
like listeners listening to all that's said, to ask,
What brought us here? What seed? What rain? What light?
What forced us upward through dark earth? What made us bloom?
What wind shall take us soon, sweeping the garden bare?
Their voiceless voices hang there, as ours might,
if we were roses, too. Their beds are blanketed with leaves,
tended by an absent gardener whose life is elsewhere.
It is the last of many last days. Is it enough?
To rest in this moment? To turn our faces to the sun?
To watch the lineaments of a world passing?
To feel the metal of a black iron bench, cool and eternal,
press against our skin? To apprehend a chill as clouds pass
overhead, turning us to shivering shade and shadow?
And then to be restored, small miracle, the sun shining brightly
as before? We go on, you leading the way, a figure
leaning on a cane that leaves its mark on the earth.
My friend, you have led me farther than I have ever been.
To a garden in autumn. To a heaven of impermanence
where the final falling off is slow, a slow and radiant happening.
The light is gold. And while we're here, I think it must be heaven.

—Elizabeth Spires

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Theater

The imposture of "Martin Guerre"

by Mark Steyn

"I'd like people to leave the theater," said West End producer Michael White, "wanting to have sex with whomever or whatever." Now that New York has given us "the *Hair* of the Nineties" in *Rent*, it was inevitable that sooner or later "the *Oh, Calcutta!* of the Nineties" would show up. White produced both *Oh, Calcutta!* and the Johnny-come-lately *Voyeurz* and, after *Voyeurz* (at the Whitehall Theatre) opened to predictably dismal reviews, he pulled out his *Oh, Cal* cuttings to demonstrate they'd been wrong then and were therefore wrong now. "*The Daily Mail* described it as a big yawn. The *Sketch* said it was dismal," he recalled. "Only Harold Hobson, in *The Sunday Times*, broke from the pack, saying it was a classic example of the British inability to deal with sex. It's exactly the same kind of language today, and Hobson is still right."

Very well. Let's try to deal with sex. Or, rather, not with *sex*: the British, like everyone else, deal with that in a million different ways in the privacy of their own homes. What we're dealing with here is the stage representation of sex—which is an even trickier maneuver. *Oh, Calcutta!* had one striking moment—right at the top of the show, when the cast appeared one by one and individually disrobed against a backdrop of various informal photographic blow-ups of their clothed selves. Presumably, Kenneth Tynan was keen to emphasize from the start that each player was not an anonymous porn-show slab of meat but a human personality—though it should surely have struck him as significant that in order to convey personality he had to show pictures of them in clothes.

The effect, of course, was to remind you that other people's total nudity in a public place almost invariably represents one thing: innocence. The opening of *Oh, Calcutta!* emphasised childlike innocence, not breezy, swinging sexual ease, and, insofar as we were engaged by them as individuals, we were aware mainly of their vulnerability: for who could doubt, as they stood there before us for thousands and thousands of performances, that ninety-nine percent of those actors wouldn't rather have been at the RSC or the National or *Annie* or *The Mousetrap* or a cheesy sitcom or just about anything else? Show business is the business of show and Tynan, as a critic, would have instantly pointed out that what that opening number was showing us was intellectually dishonest and at odds with what followed: he and his sketch writers—Jules Feiffer, John Lennon, Sam Shepard among them—were supposed to be revelling in the salacious, the "dirty," as a means not just of sexual liberation but of political and social liberation.

A quarter-century on, things have improved at least to this extent: *Voyeurz* has a Sixties sitar number and some Eighties sub-Madonna (never the best position to find yourself in) rock-video religious im-

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agery, but, compared to Tynan's claims for *Oh, Calcutta!*, Michael White is admirably straightforward; he wants *Voyeurz* to inspire us to sexual congress and make a lot of money for him. If only Tynan had been as clear-sighted: the show ran for years, but, disdaining professional advice, he'd signed a pathetically disadvantageous contract. Thus, he wound up irreparably damaging his reputation, but without any appropriate financial compensation. Happily, Michael Lewis and Peter Rafelson, the author-directors of *Voyeurz*, have no reputation to damage and, after this show, it's probably not worth attempting to acquire one. But, accidentally or otherwise, they teach Tynan and those other big shots a thing or two. There is no innocent nudity in *Voyeurz*. There are breasts and pudenda and a brace of impressive penises, but all these wobbly and choreographically undisciplined attractions are surrounded by tacky accessories—whips, high heels, white stockings, and suspenders mostly, as well as, in one of the more inventive scenes, lederhosen and a bowler hat. The costumes are meant to be erotic, but, as it's the sort of erotica you can only get from erotic boutiques and therefore dulled by categorization, it isn't erotic at all.

The story, such as it is, concerns a farm girl from Virginia (geddit?) who wakes up a bit flushed in the middle of the night and decides to go to the big city, where various members of the American soft-rock lipstick lesbian combo Fem 2 Fem encourage her to explore her sexuality. Everyone's exploring their sexuality these days. It used to be that people explored the Tyrol or the ruins of Carthage, but go there now and you'll have the place to yourself. Watching someone else explore her sexuality is less rewarding, though. Michael White may think his show "deals with sex," but his authors know better—providing a cheerfully cynical tour of the modern sex industry. The audience judged it perfectly: whenever a predatory lesbian bumped and ground and crept up on our unsuspecting heroine, they bellowed out the stock cries of a Christmas panto audience—"She's right behind you!" etc; during the soulfully Sapphic ballads, they waved their arms above their heads as at a football stadium singalong. Compared to the solemn deference accorded *Rent*, I found this an encouraging reaction.

No doubt it merely reflects the West End audience's inability to deal with sex. But Tynan and his collaborators had the last word on that back in *Oh, Calcutta!* The most common sexual act is heterosexual penetrative intercourse in a prone position. Tynan showed us one such couple, fully nude with lights up—and played it for laughs. For what other reaction could there be? Sex—plain old one-on-one boy-girl sex—is, for anyone other than the participants, almost invariably ludicrous. It's something experienced internally, not externally. You cannot deal with it by replicating it.

Here's my idea of how to deal with sex on stage: the *Merry Widow* waltz. In the show, it starts tentatively, with a cautious, hummed chorus; then, almost reluctantly, Count Danilo and the widow begin to waltz; and, gradually, decorous restrained formal movement yields to a giddily confident, sweeping lyricism. I don't suppose Franz Lehar and his librettists, Victor Léon and Leo Stein, sat down and figured it all out (though turn-of-the-century Vienna was brimming with hormones), but in this one moment they capture the impulse to sex, not the act itself, which is mere confirmation. By the end of the number, properly staged, something as intense as sex has been communicated. Previously, dance in opera and operetta had meant marches, drills, ballets, big chorus set-pieces, while in the wider world it was used mainly as an expression of community—the martial formations of both courtly and country dancing. With a single melody, Lehar changed dance from a group social activity to the most potent stage metaphor for sexual feeling.

That's the way they dealt with it in the Habsburg Empire.

The fate of *Voyeurz* is no great concern one way or the other. As far as the nudity's concerned, the learned critic John Gross sug-

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gested that there were rather fewer bare buttocks in the alleged sex-fest than in the battle scenes of *Troilus and Cressida*: I wasn't counting them myself, but that fits my own impression. But, at least in *Voyeurz*, the buttocks are a large proportion of what the show's about. In *Troilus*, they're not, and their presence is far more destabilizing. The upscale end of legit wants to deal with sex, too, even when there's none to deal with.

Traditionally, *Troilus and Cressida* pits two warring camps against each other: the Greek camp and the Trojan camp. In the RSC's new production (at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-on-Avon), the warring camps are quite different: there is the choreographic camp of Lindsay Dolan, who stages those bare-buttock battle scenes, and there is the directorial camp of Ian Judge, who seems to have urged his principals into a campier-than-thou grab for attention. Ajax (Ross O'Hennessy) is less a Greek warrior than an audition for the Chippendales. Cressida's uncle Pandarus (Clive Francis) is a preening queen in a panto dame get-up with the hots for Hector. Patroclus silences the fruity Thersites with a big kiss on the lips. All this would have been news to Shakespeare.

Far from being unable to deal with sex, we seem to be unable to deal with anything else—and to have lost our capacity to imagine a world where sex is not the underlying motivation for everything. Like the Richard Eyre/Ian McKellen *Richard III* (recently translated to film), Judge's *Troilus* comes close to suggesting that war is the inexorable consequence of closeted homosexuality. Shakespeare and his audience were perfectly at ease with sex, but they also understood other human motives, too. Curiously enough, Judge's production suffocates in sexuality, yet in the one sexual relationship in the play as written—that between Troilus and Cressida—there's no chemistry at all: compared to the happy campers all around, Joseph Fiennes (younger brother of Ralph) and Victoria Hamilton just don't spark.

Next door, at the RSC's Swan Theatre, Richard Nelson's *The General from America* attempts the rehabilitation of Benedict Arnold. Nelson is the RSC's resident American, a dramatist who specializes in plays on Anglo-American themes, some of which (*New England*) have transferred to New York but most of which seem to play better in Stratford and London. If you go by the coarse Yank stereotypes in *Some Americans Abroad*, you could easily see Nelson as a kind of Benedict Arnold of American dramatists. Even so, with this new play, Nelson seems to have thrown his lot in with the redcoats once and for all. Arnold (James Laurenson) is treated sympathetically, but the play never takes us deep enough inside him to understand his reasons or to engage us in a crisis of conscience.

The piece works best in capturing the uncertain, makeshift, frequently self-serving, bigoted atmosphere of America at independence—a time before what it means to be "American" had been defined and mythologized. All this is interesting stuff, but the play keeps distracting itself with caricatures. The British spy Major Andre is a tipsy stagestruck fop cruelly oblivious to the fact that his commander, Sir Henry Clinton, is deeply in love with him. History, the liberal educational theorists used to complain, is too much about dates. These days, it's exclusively about dates: the General can't put down the colonial insurrection because he wants to go dancing with his Major down at the local leather bar. Bernard Levin once began his column in *The Times* by saying, "Everyone is homosexual except me." We should take Bernard at his word (he was at the time dating Arianna Stassinopoulos in her pre-Huffington phase), accept the gaying of history and move on.

A few years back, Michael White bemoaned to me, "You can't shock anyone anymore. Well, I suppose you can—look at *The Satanic Verses*. But that's not really what I had in mind." Quite. The theater wants you to go, Oh, my God! Let me get a look!, not Oh, my God! Let me kill him! But *épater les bourgeois* is a game of diminishing

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returns. The most exquisite music to be heard in Britain this summer was William Christie conducting the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment in Handel's *Theodora* (at Glyndebourne), beautifully sung by a cast led by Dawn Upshaw. What was happening on stage, though, was something else entirely. Theodora is the Christian martyr in fourth-century Antioch who refuses to comply with the authorities' edict that on the Emperor's birthday all must pay homage to the gods of Rome. Rejecting this as not "relevant" to a modern audience, the director, America's enfant terrible Peter Sellars, chose to transfer the piece to—where else?—latter-day Washington, and stage it as a savage indictment of western militarism.

On the night I was there, the British Defence Secretary, Michael Portillo, had chosen to take his U.S. opposite number, William Perry, General Shalikashvilli, and various other NATO bigwigs for a night out. I assume Portillo thought it would be a droll joke to subject the Pentagon's finest to a four-hour assault on the brutality and hypocrisy of America. Before the show began, Sellars was introduced to Perry and company and immediately launched into a lecture. They were politely attentive at first, but after ten minutes their eyes began glazing over, and after twenty they were backing away. "What's wrong with these guys?" Sellars said to me. "They're such hard work." He made one more effort to reach them: "I really hope that you guys get this. It's *so* important that you guys get this."

It's not, you know. I'm sure the guys enjoyed the music, but, as of this writing, it hasn't affected government policy in either the U.K. or the U.S. Directors like Sellars are indulged, because they're irrelevant. His transplant is so fake it's not worth worrying about: instead of Christian martyrs, the chorus is converted into Malcolm X and similarly fashionable "martyrs"; troops run on and off in bright orange nuclear suits; the U.S. President is a staggering drunk, who slurs his way through one aria.

Handel was a fine comical composer when he wanted to be, and, if you'd asked him to write a drunk song, he could have done it in his sleep. But he didn't, because that's not what was on his mind here. What he was concerned with were spiritual matters, and that really is a subject the contemporary arts world is uncomfortable dealing with. Sellars would much rather peddle a specious parallel about political martyrdom, because the power of faith and the belief in redemption are of no concern to him. The public is still interested in these questions, but those who make our plays and films and operas are just about the last people qualified to address them. Earlier this year, I was at a conference in Hollywood, when a lady from the audience asked why there were no films that dealt positively with religious themes. Carmine Zozzora, producer of *Die Hard with a Vengeance*, replied in all seriousness that they'd tried that with *The Last Temptation of Christ* but that it had bombed.

Which brings me to *Martin Guerre* (at the Prince Edward). It shouldn't bring me anywhere near *Martin Guerre*, but it's a measure of how badly wrong things have gone with the latest British mega-musical that it winds up spending several million pounds to argue the merits of Protestantism versus Catholicism.

The story has its origins in a famous court case in Toulouse in 1560. Bertrande de Rois had claimed that the man she'd been living with in the Pyrenean village of Artigat for the last three years was not her husband Martin Guerre, but an imposter. The real Martin had abandoned her twelve years earlier, and then a man resembling him had returned. Now she had discovered that the man she took to be her spouse was really one Arnaud du Thil from a Gascon village forty miles away. The judge took a dim view of all this and was about to rule against Bertrande when Martin Guerre *lui-même* suddenly showed up, having been away soldiering in Spain. The court sentenced Arnaud to burn at the stake.

Since then, the case has inspired innumerable lawyers, poets, historians, and

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dramatists, beginning with the first tell-all behind-the-scenes account by Judge Jean de Coras. Montaigne used the case to discuss the uncertainty of evidence, Leibniz to debate the meaning of identity. In our own time, the story has inspired the movie *Le Retour de Martin Guerre* and a Hollywood imitation thereof, *Summersby*. Both versions suggest the woman's complicity in the imposture: in it she sees, according to one of the authors of the French film, "a momentary sense of possibility in the tight world of the sixteenth-century village."

This is an intriguing subject for a musical, but not, unfortunately, for the kind of musical Alain Boublil and Claude-Michel Schonberg write. In both *Les Miserables* and *Miss Saigon*, still running in London and everywhere else after eleven and seven years respectively, they pinpointed small human dramas against the great canvas of history. Schonberg writes big, declarative, somewhat overwrought ballads ideal for, say, the scene in *Miss Saigon* when the Vietnamese girl begs the father of her child, a U.S. Marine, and his new wife to take the little boy with them back to America. It's easy to mock this sort of thing, and New York theatricals often do; on the other hand, whenever Stephen Sondheim has to write something big-hearted and open-throated, he can't.

The old Broadway musical was smart, sassy, cynical; the new British musical is earnest, foursquare, and portentous—and more people seem to like it that way. There's a moment in the retuned Gershwin show *Crazy for You* when the Broadway wiseacres have a dig at the usurpers: a guy rushes on, sees a heap of piled-up chairs and tables and, referring to Trevor Nunn and John Caird's recreation of the Paris barricades in *Les Miserables*, says, "What is this? The French Revolution?" This may be a better joke than its authors intend: *Les Miserables* is not about *the* French Revolution, but about some quite different ones some decades afterward.

For *Miss Saigon*, Boublil and Schonberg applied the *Les Miz* formula to the Vietnam War. "I did a lot of research," its leading man Jonathan Pryce told a London newspaper, "and I found that people in Saigon at that time did, in fact, sing everything." There's more to this joke than meets Pryce's heavy-lidded Oriental eye-pieces. The most interesting question in all the opera-versus-musicals discussions at the time was whether "singing everything" meant automatically abandoning reality. The through-composed musical gets by on subjects like *The Phantom of the Opera* because we're prepared to accept lush tunes, flowery lyrics, and general swanning about from larger-than-life figures entirely removed from our own lives—the sort of shows, to quote Lee Shubert's brute dismissal of costume drama, where guys write letters with feathers. In *Miss Saigon*, Boublil and Schonberg offered a modestly hopeful formal advance: they proved you could apply the through-sung form to a naturalistic, contemporary subject. They didn't get any credit from the Broadway whingers: "Oh, sure, *Madam Butterfly* set in the Vietnam War. Anyone could do that." But the point is, nobody did. And, while we're weighing the merits of Puccini retreads, *Madam Butterfly* relocated to Vietnam raises the stakes; *La Bohème* relocated to Greenwich Village (as in *Rent*) diminishes them: it's the triumph of New York theater parochialism.

But *Martin Guerre* isn't that kind of story and what's washed up on stage suggests that, having embraced Puccini, Victor Hugo, Eva Peron, and T. S. Eliot, the London mega-musical has finally run up against the limits of the form. Most critics wrote of this piece as an "operetta of our time," but operetta deals in certainties—and the story of *Martin Guerre* is a more complex, psychological drama. The key scene is the return of the false Martin and Bertrande's reaction. Even the Hollywood version understands that: you're never sure what's going on inside Jodie Foster's mind, what accommodations she's reaching within herself. In a musical version, it calls for music and movement—something faltering and

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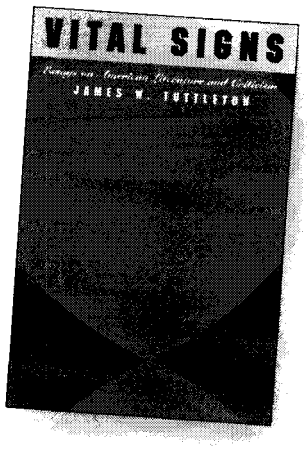

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ethereal like the old *Merry Widow* waltz. Instead, she says that she knows he's not the real Martin and next thing you know they're singing:

> And all I know
> Is that all I want to be
> Is close to you. . . .
> I love you so
> And the love of you
> Is all I'll ever know.

I made a small promise to myself that this season I'd treat plays and operas and all points in between exactly alike. After all, for thousands of years, from the Greeks to the Elizabethans, theater happily drew on all elements—words, songs, masques, ballets, tableaux. Only relatively recently have we pushed spoken words and sung words into opposing corners. But it is a curious fact that—in obliterating the distinction between dialogue and song, between speech and soliloquy—the through-composed musical is paradoxically the most literal of forms. Everyone spends a lot of time singing exposition at each other:

> PIERRE: Protestants could soon be
> spreading all about
>
> MME DE ROLS: Well, my dear Pierre,
> that can never be . . .

When they're not relaying information, the lyrics tend to be static and head-on. All the ambiguities of the story have been sacrificed, because that's not how Boublil and Schonberg write. So, because they've picked a subject their style can't accommodate, their collaborators have tried to nudge the show closer to their previous work. To match the human tapestry of *Les Miz*, the village of Artigat has been promoted to the foreground, which means we have to sit through a tiresome parade of cardboard cutouts—bawdy peasants, old crones and village idiots. As an equivalent to the dramatic backdrop of *Miss Saigon*, the story has been shunted forward a few years

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so it can be set against the religious wars. But the authors, as much as Peter Sellars or Carmine Zozzoro, have nothing to say about God and faith and theology other than that we've lost sight of the real God:

> A God who was born in a stable
> A pauper who gave his life to save us . . .

The only acceptable God to modern entertainment values, it seems, is a compassionate, inclusive, non-judgemental type who believes in generous welfare provision.

Broadway musicals were the work of a small select group of people, which is why, eventually, they all began to sound and look the same. In London, Cameron Mackintosh developed a knack of teaming Boublil and Schonberg and Andrew Lloyd Webber with quirky, unlikely lyricists and directors from operas and the classics—often, in fact, fellows who didn't much like musicals. But the golden touch has brought forward only dross this time: in the same way that, say, *They're Playing Our Song* is a generic Broadway musical, so *Martin Guerre* is a generic British mega-musical. Edward Hardy, the neophyte lyricist, offers off-the-peg peasant ribaldry—"Needs a proper man to provide a proper poke"—and not a single strong song idea. Declan Donellan is the respected founder of the Cheek by Jowl company and has directed Shakespeare and Ostrovsky and Ibsen—all of whom are director-proof. Here, he's been given a co-adaptor's credit, and his storytelling has failed him: at the end, audience members were muttering to themselves whether it was Bertrande or Martin who'd converted to Protestantism. His long-time partner, the designer Nick Ormerod, has eschewed both the big theatrical gestures of *Miss Saigon* (the helicopter, the Ho Chi Minh statue) and the clean stage images of *Les Miz* and dumped the whole thing on a drab set with nothing but three endlessly revolving post-and-beam lifeguard stands to look at. Only the American choreographer Bob Avian has succeeded in finding any kind of distinctive vocabulary for the piece, inventing a sort of Broadway version of clog dancing. As for the music, if you're wondering why I suddenly brought up the *Merry Widow* waltz, it's because the best tune in the score—"Over a Year"—is, albeit unintentionally, almost a perfect lift from Lehar, though, sadly, not used to such good dramatic purpose.

Ce n'est pas magnifique, et ce n'est pas Martin Guerre. For the first time since *Cats* here's a big Cameron Mackintosh show that is unlikely ever to come to New York, or at least not in anything remotely resembling its present shape. That's Broadway's opportunity—if only there was anyone left to seize it.

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Art

"The realest thing I had ever done": Andrew Forge in New Haven

by Karen Wilkin

At a recent dinner, the conversation—fueled, I admit, by liberal amounts of very good red wine—became a kind of Socratic dialogue about the practice of art criticism. Is it more difficult to write about art you admire or art you detest? (Those abused terms "good" and "bad" were employed.) Which is harder to deal with, figurative or abstract art? Art of the past or of the present? Does intention matter? No consensus was reached about the relative problems posed by historical versus contemporary art, since we veered off into an extended argument about the obligation to understand context and "decode," as they say, narrative. There was, however, general agreement that it's easier to find the rapier phrase to puncture inadequate or pretentious work than to come up with a verbal equivalent for the wordless experience of being deeply moved by something you believe to be first rate. There was agreement, too, that art that depends wholly upon the visual, devoid of irony, obvious narrative, or recognizable imagery, art equipped with neither integrated nor accompanying text—especially if you believe it to be first rate—is harder to deal with than art that is inherently literary. Some of us even maintained that the best art is not only difficult to write about but can make explicatory texts irrelevant and inadequate; the most appropriate response seems to be to remain silent and, if you must, point. (One dissident insisted that it made him want to participate.) Someone raised the vexed question of whether artists themselves are the best interpreters of their own—or anyone else's—work, but then dessert arrived and hypothetical distinctions gave way to real decisions.

All of which is a rather oblique and long-winded way of saying that trying to write about Andrew Forge's remarkable retrospective exhibition at the Yale Center for British Art this past summer seems presumptuous and possibly even silly.[1] In the first place, Forge is himself a distinguished critic. (He is, in fact, known chiefly in some circles for his criticism and for his important contribution as a teacher, particularly during his twenty years at Yale University, notwithstanding a career as a painter that began in the 1950s.) Forge's reputation for being incisive and articulate was borne out by his brief, trenchant comments in the exhibition's wall texts and catalogue, a collection of level-headed observations that not only illuminate his motivations and his process, but, it could be argued, obviate an article like this one.

As if Forge's ability to say enlightening

1 "Andrew Forge: A Retrospective" was on view at the Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, from May 15, 1996, through July 14. A catalogue of the exhibition, with an introduction by the artist and essays by John Hollander and Michael Kubovy, was published by the Yale Center for British Art (38 pages, $18.95 paper).

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things about his own work (something he shares with few of his colleagues) were not inhibiting enough to anyone attempting to write about his exhibition, further difficulties are posed by the nature of the pictures themselves. They are fiercely intelligent and extraordinarily hard to pin down, especially those made after 1963, when the forty-year-old artist abandoned the loose perceptual realism of his earlier paintings for a cerebral, but utterly sensual "abstraction" of perception. The show was, of course, dominated by works made after 1963, more specifically by pictures made during the past two decades or so, from intimate works on paper to small canvases to large canvases that have rarely been seen before. This astonishingly ambitious, consistent body of work (and the paintings of the last fifteen years in particular) made it plain that Forge, despite his gifts as a perceptive critic, is first and foremost a true painter's painter, someone wholly absorbed by fundamental issues of seeing, not in terms of theory or ideology, but in terms of making pictures, a position that reinforces the suggestion that language might not be fully up to the task of dealing with these works. It might deal adequately with intention, perhaps, but not with effect.

The show began with a selection of landscapes and figures from the 1950s and early 1960s that made evident Forge's origins in a quintessentially British brand of painterly realism based on dispassionate scrutiny that can be traced to one of his early teachers at the Camberwell School of Art, William Coldstream. Confronted by his intimate, rather hermetic early pictures, it was easy to remember that Forge the critic had written intelligently about Vermeer, but at the same time, it was equally clear that his loyalties were wide-ranging, that his admiration was extended also to masters who regarded the world around them not with detachment, but with passionate engagement. If his early landscapes and clothed figures seemed particularly British in their attachment to the special qualities of English light and scale, there was at least one vigorous portrait that reminded you that Forge had also written about Soutine, while his powerful nudes suggested still other, even more overwhelming enthusiasms in their overt homage to the robust domestic goddesses of Courbet and, especially, Rembrandt. It's impossible to look at the paintings of women undressing in the first part of Forge's show, their chunky torsos dominating an urgently worked "sea" of pigment, without thinking of that thundering paean to the humanity of human flesh, Rembrandt's *A Woman Bathing* (1654, National Gallery, London); a perceptive colleague has called this iconic image of a wading figure hiking her shift to expose sturdy legs, "Beethoven's Ninth for figurative painters." (It would not have been possible to guess solely from the evidence of the exhibited pictures that Forge had written extensively on Klee.)

Rembrandt, I suspect, may have been more important to Forge's early aspirations than anyone, his British teachers included, to judge by the overall weight and mass of image and paint in his early works. Yet even these apparently intelligible figurative paintings prove to be less straightforward than they seem at first viewing. Forge's palette is quirky, often abrasive, less tied to place and time than his foundation in the British tradition of direct observation would lead you to expect. And curiously, his overwhelming concern even in his early works proves to be far less for fidelity to perception than for creating equivalents for the experience of perceiving with loaded, thick, almost visceral paint. (My having to resort to that kind of convolution, I submit, proves my point about the difficulty of writing sensibly about these works.) Much more than appearances are addressed by Forge's insistently stroked images; they are, for example, not simply about what a woman looks like when she pulls a slip over her head, but about tactile memory, frequently combined with a kind of generalized nostalgia. I kept thinking of what Anthony Caro said of the thickset, earthbound

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bronze figures he was making at more or less the same time that Forge painted pictures like *S. Undressing I*, (1959, collection of the artist), a solid nude who raises her arms with effort, both figure and surrounding space slowed and thickened by densely loaded paint. Caro described his rough-textured nudes struggling to pull off a shirt or to press themselves into a sitting position as being "about what it is like to be inside the body," a condition, apparently, of being oppressed by gravity, an equivalent, perhaps, of the way Forge's figures seem to be oppressed by the material of paint.

If Forge's early figurative paintings demand clumsy phrases and complicated analogies to suggest their idiosyncrasies, his mature abstractions appear not only to defy the limitations of words but to defy ordinary vision, as though grasping them required sensory equipment beyond the usual human complement. Constructed out of slowly vibrating accumulations of dots, they are complex harmonic orchestrations of color that seem completely self-sufficient and resolved at the same time that they virtually elude being seen. (Yes, I know it sounds absurd to claim this as a quality present in any painting, much less one that I believe to be of a high order of excellence.) Each picture appears, at first acquaintance, to have a single dominant hue, but over time, internal rhythms, divisions, and sometimes startlingly explicit structures, all created by unpredictable color shifts, slowly begin to declare themselves. When you try to focus on them, to see them more clearly, they dissolve into the dominant expanse, so that you begin to doubt whether you have glimpsed them at all. On occasion, when you see a painting from a new vantage point, as you move across the gallery, these structures momentarily reassert themselves with startling clarity and then subside once again. It's rather like the way things that loom in the dark become incoherent to the point of vanishing when you look at them directly but become intelligible when you look away, relying on the fringes of sight.

Forge is well aware of the difficulties posed by his pictures, but says simply that they "take a long time to make," adding, quietly but firmly, that he "would like them to be looked at slowly enough for the viewer's eye to accommodate to their structure; and at as many different distances as the gallery allows." He is insistent, however, that while each of his post-1963 paintings is ultimately based on real perceptual experience—a specific place, a model, a studio set-up—he does not strive to reproduce what has been seen in an obvious or direct way.

This is not to suggest that Forge's later paintings are optical puzzles, that he is amusing himself with sophisticated visual games or systematically exploring optical phenomena. If this were the case, his pictures would be mere curiosities capable, at best, of arousing interest only for as long as it took to discover the way their devices functioned. I suppose that at some level, Forge's work could be looked at this way, but I suspect that even if they were approached as optical diversions, other qualities would begin to insist on being acknowledged. If you invest the time Forge requests from his viewers, his best paintings provide ample, sustained emotional—as well as intellectual—rewards. These demanding, elusive abstractions turn out to be surprisingly similar, in intent if not in form, to Forge's landscapes and figures. As the artist has alerted us, his shimmering abstractions, no less than his sturdily constructed early works, are based on direct observation of a kind—"heightened awareness" might be a more accurate phrase. Their unstable structures and color shifts are somehow derived from Forge's sensitivity to particular places, seasons, times of day, and the like, so that the most powerful paintings function as concentrated, distilled essences of intense, personal experience, without, however, being in any way illusionistic. Forge's dotted color application has nothing to do with replicating the visible, nor does it have anything to do with pointillism. The apparent similarity of application is deceptive. Seurat's way of ap-

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plying paint in repetitive uniform dots was a means to an end, a necessary function of dividing color into discrete units that would mix in the eye in order to render form convincingly. Forge's touches of paint, far from being subservient to some sort of depiction, as they are in Seurat's pictures, are declaratively "real." Each of the obsessively repeated colored dots—whose size and shape vary subtly across the picture, setting up rhythms that Forge calls "drumming"—refers to itself and nothing else. It is simply evidence of the act of transferring a given quantity of pigment onto a given expanse of canvas; initially, Forge tells us, he simply decided, intuitively, to use the smallest brush and the largest canvas he had at his disposal. In many pictures, eccentric trails of widely spaced, contrasting dots and/or staccato, linear marks—which Forge calls "sticks"—set up counterrhythms. They track perceptual paths or diagram trajectories through space and then take their places once again as incidents in the silt of dots, to read as punctuation, as accents, or as incipient, wholly metaphorical tears in the tenuously woven color fabric. The last is more evident in paintings where the veil of dots frays conspicuously at the edge of the canvas or the sheet of paper, revealing both the artifice of the tissue of accumulated touches and its inherent instability. The result, however, is not simply an assertion of surface and extension, but a pulsing declaration of intuitive logic, perhaps even of intuitive order. Mood and temperature vary, most dramatically, perhaps, in the eleven paintings of the on-going "Months" series, from the cool, confrontational implied geometry of brooding gray *November* (1980–81, collection of Ruth Miller) to the dazzling golden heat of *August* (1995–96, collection of the artist).

Forge is probably the most lucid guide to how his pictures develop—a textbook example of the painter in the role of what Michael Fried would call the first beholder of his work—whose discussion emphasizes the way pictorial meaning evolves out of process:

> Each painting starts with a single dot, and it grows as dots accrue over the field of the canvas. During the early stages, the formative principle is simply the vibration of the dots, whether in ordered constellations or randomly dispersed. As the white field of the canvas is covered dot by dot, color reveals itself; the light of the canvas must be rediscovered and reconstructed out of the interaction of the colored dots. Slowly, ways of reading the picture come up. Areas press forward or drop back. There are alternatives of substance and transparency.

It all sounds simple. But even this unpretentious, hands-on description falls short of conveying the uncannily coexistent sensuous pleasure and intellectual challenge afforded by Forge's most achieved pictures. Like so much of the most rigorous, serious, and—if you can still use the word in polite company—just plain *best* art, they are served most by being looked at, in receptive silence, for a long time.

The realities of the museum world being what they are, the exhibition is, of course, accompanied by words in the form of a modest catalogue with a short introduction by the artist, who also selected the works in the exhibition. Two essays follow. The first, by Forge's friend, the poet and critic John Hollander, professor of English at Yale, is an erudite rumination on Forge's history, as well as a discussion of specific works; perhaps the most enlightening passages, however, are Forge's own comments. A quotation from a remarkable interview with Forge, conducted (not by Hollander) in 1986, for example, describes his excitement at the genesis of the dot paintings. Recalling the moment after placing the first dot "without any thought" on "the biggest canvas that I had," Forge says, "that point looked back at me like an eye . . . but also it and the canvas were talking to each other, too, so it was just hanging there and I felt it was the realest thing I had ever done." The second essay, by Michael Kubovy, a cognitive psychologist "known for his research on

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the foundations of human visual and auditory perception," is a highly academic document that begins with the question "Why do Andrew Forge's paintings look as they do?" and attempts to provide answers with diagrams of surprising optical illusions, replicas of the component elements of the paintings, and a lot of arcane prose with plentiful sidebar asides. The catalogue's reproductions, with the exception of the 1996 gouache effectively reproduced actual size on the cover, range from inadequate to deplorable, providing no idea of the subtlety, vivacity, or richness of Forge's work. Neither the camera nor the four-color process, it seems, is up to the demands of translating these difficult pictures into something intelligible and visually stimulating, at a reduced scale. But then, neither are words.

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Art

Is there Meret beyond the teacup?

by Mario Naves

The phrase "one-hit wonder" is used by rock critics to describe a singer or musical group whose commercial success is based on a single hit song. While it may not be entirely appropriate to employ the vernacular of the Top Forty in writing about the visual arts, I can think of no better way to describe the contribution of Meret Oppenheim (1913–85) to modernist culture. Her *Object (Breakfast in Fur)* (1936), commonly referred to as "the furry teacup," has long been a textbook example of Surrealist art. What student of art history has not suffered a shock of recognition upon encountering it in the Museum of Modern Art's permanent collection? While it may not have the renown of Dalí's flaccid watches or Magritte's bowler-hatted automatons, *Object (Breakfast in Fur)* is just as pithy a manifestation of the Surrealist ethos and the sine qua non of Oppenheim's reputation.

That the rest of Oppenheim's work has been eclipsed by *Object (Breakfast in Fur)* can be surmised from a friend's response upon hearing of this, the artist's first U.S. retrospective: "You mean she did something else?" I am sure that Jacqueline Burckhardt and Bice Curiger, curators of "Meret Oppenheim: Beyond the Teacup," have heard this question before—it's implicit in the title of their exhibition.[1] By including paintings, drawings, sculpture, and, yes, *Object (Breakfast in Fur)* in the exhibition, Burckhardt and Curiger set out to prove that there is more to Oppenheim's oeuvre than a single object. Those wishing to brush up on their art history, or who are curious, will find the exhibit informative. Of course, Burckhardt and Curiger also want to increase our respect for Oppenheim the artist, and this is a trickier task. As the show reveals, there isn't much of anything "Beyond the Teacup."

Oppenheim created *Object (Breakfast in Fur)* at the age of twenty-three, four years after arriving in Paris in 1932 from Basel. She became friends with Hans Arp and Alberto Giacometti and through them met Marcel Duchamp, Max Ernst, Man Ray, and André Breton, who is said to have titled Oppenheim's signature work. In 1933 she posed for a series of photographs by Man Ray, one of which featured a nude Oppenheim standing next to a printing press, her left arm smeared with ink. This photo caused a scandal when it was published in the Surrealist journal *Minotaure* in 1934 and

1 "Meret Oppenheim: Beyond the Teacup" opened at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, on June 28, 1996, and remains on view through October 9. The show will travel to the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (November 2, 1996–January 11, 1997), the Bass Museum of Art, Miami Beach (February 6–April 6, 1997), and the Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha (May 10–July 6, 1997). A catalogue of the exhibition, with essays by Jacqueline Burckhardt, Bice Curiger, Joseph Helfenstein, Nancy Spector, and Thomas McEvilley, has been published by Independent Curators Incorporated (176 pages, $32.95 paper).

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garnered Oppenheim the reputation of Surrealist "muse." It was not until *Object (Breakfast in Fur)* was purchased by Alfred H. Barr, Jr. for the Museum of Modern Art in 1936, however, that Oppenheim gained a notoriety that would define her as a Surrealist artist.

While it retains a modicum of fetishistic allure, *Object (Breakfast in Fur)* has lost whatever capacity it may once have had to provoke. The furry teacup is, after all, something of a modernist classic, and once an intentionally disturbing object has been granted such a status, it loses much of its reason for being. Such is the case with Oppenheim's masterpiece. It is difficult to believe, at this late date, that anyone would find what is basically a rather stylish amusement repugnant or revelatory. If it retains any interest for us today it is as a document of the Surrealist epoch. This is not nothing. Alfred Barr wrote that the furry teacup "makes concretely real the most extreme, the most bizarre improbability," and so it does. Barr's purchase of *Object (Breakfast in Fur)* for MOMA's collection seems, in retrospect, nothing less than a coup. That the definitive museum of modern art should have one of the definitive artifacts of Surrealism was, undoubtedly, Barr's objective. But shouldn't we expect more from art than a momentary case of the heebie-jeebies?

One thing "Beyond the Teacup" makes plain is that *Object (Breakfast in Fur)* was not, as might be supposed, the hard-won culmination of one individual's artistic inquiry. It was, simply stated, a fluke. Indeed, the remarkable aspect of Oppenheim's work is its amateurishness. *Eichhörnchen/Squirrel* (1960), a belated sequel to the furry teacup, is typical of Oppenheim's output. Here the artist takes a beer stein, complete with a sponge simulating foam, upon which she attaches a squirrel's tail for a handle. With this piece, Surrealist strategy is reduced to kitsch and a rather desperate kitsch at that. *Eichhörnchen/Squirrel* reminds me of nothing so much as the mythical "jackalope"—in actuality, a taxidermic rabbit whose head has been mounted with deer antlers—that I encountered in truck stops growing up in Utah. If *Eichhörnchen* is the most embarrassing object on display, its lack of aesthetic merit (or imagination) is, nevertheless, indicative of the quality of the art on view in "Beyond the Teacup."

As an exhibition, Oppenheim's retrospective is small and higgledy-piggledy. The installation avoids chronology in order to stress, as the curators would have it, the work's "conceptual underpinnings." Yet the work is so unfocused and indolent that it is impossible to divine what exactly these underpinnings are. In his catalogue essay, Thomas McEvilley locates them in Oppenheim's "parallelisms" of nature/culture, female/male, and representation/abstraction. This sounds good (and weighty), but it is just an example of someone taking the conceptual ball and running with it. And can McEvilley *run*. His interpretation of *Frühlingstag/Spring Day* (1961) is, as a blatant sop to politics, unintentionally farcical and not in the least surprising. Can such an inconsequential knickknack—a lumpy biomorph emerging from a small, wire basket—really be about "the limitation of women in the patriarchy and their dream of breaking free"? Is it any wonder why art criticism is considered the domain of blowhards and hucksters?

So what we are left with, finally, are odds and ends: paintings so arid they shrink from the eye, errant scribbles posing as drawings, academic Surrealist sculpture, and assemblages that might pass for those of a moderately gifted folk artist. Oppenheim's attempts at tapping into the formal and, one would guess, spiritual authority of non-Western art, as in *Oktavia/Octavia* (1969), are put to shame by any single work found in the stunning "Africa" exhibition in the Guggenheim's main rotunda.[2] Burckhardt and Curiger claim that the inconsis-

2 "Africa: The Art of a Continent" opened at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, on June 7, 1996, and remains on view through September 29.

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tency of Oppenheim's oeuvre is predicated on her "ethical stand" of freedom from the "absolute truth of style." But if there ever were an advertisement for "the absolute truth of style," "Beyond the Teacup" is it. The curators' grandstanding is a subterfuge for an artist for whom art seems to have been little more than a diversion.

Still, *Steinfrau/Stone Woman* (1937), a small charcoal study, has a convincing sense of volume and weight, displaying a measure of artistic talent. It is, interestingly, a sculptor's drawing and an exceptional curio in an exceptionally curious career. Yet the most representative objects are two self-portraits that greet the viewer upon entering the exhibition. Neither is a portrait in the conventional sense: one is a monotype of the artist's hand from 1959, the other an x-ray of Oppenheim's head from 1964. They don't tell us about Oppenheim, just that they are *of* Oppenheim. And this is where celebrity—well, art-world celebrity—is given priority over aesthetics. "Beyond the Teacup" inflates a scrawny body of work on this basis and, in doing so, makes its own small contribution to the trivialization of art. Give Oppenheim credit for the furry teacup. But give Burckhardt, Curiger, and McEvilley credit for nothing more than confusing the cult of personality for the life of art.

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Dance

Figures in the carpet

by Laura Jacobs

One of the basic poses in ballet, arabesque takes its name from a form of Moorish ornament. In ballet it is a position of the body, in profile, supported on one leg . . . with the other leg extended behind and at right angles to it, and the arms held in various harmonious positions creating the longest possible line from the fingertips to the toes. The shoulders must be held square to the line of direction.

—The Dover Dictionary of Classical Ballet

The arabesque looks simple at first: a stork-like standing on one leg, the other leg arrowed straight back, a banner, a comet's tail. The arabesque is odd (which explains the mixed metaphor in the previous sentence). It is complex, a pulse point of oppositions: vertical versus horizontal, stillness versus flight. And it is subject to strict rules. *Dover*'s dictate about the shoulders—that they must be held square—is much like the fairy godmother in Cinderella saying, "Leave by midnight." The image dissolves when the rules are broken.

Arabesque is the queen of ballet steps—its own rule. That long line from fingertips to toe is a kind of horizon, a sovereignty surveyed. It can even seem a flying carpet, the dancer's torso riding up above the earth. Among the lost Balanchine ballets most mourned by the late Lincoln Kirstein was *The Figure in the Carpet* from the 1960s, a work whose dances, he wrote, "suggested the age in which the arabesque of Islamic ornament wove itself into Western European fashion and design, just as the *arabesque*, our ballet position, fixed the place of Islam in a royal academy of dancing at Versailles." Kirstein remarks that *The Figure in the Carpet* "was too unwieldy to maintain"; others suggest it was musically monotonous. Arabesques, too, are prey to such failings—this statuesque design can quickly become static, heavy. As the *Oxford Companion to Art* reminds us, the arabesque was abstracted from a plant form. It must breathe and grow.

And so the great arabesques are more than a pose; they are a phenomenon, like Caruso's ringing high C or Montserrat Caballé's stratospheric pianissimo. They can suggest the high wire, held note of a violin; or silence within a soliloquy, that stirring in the shadow of language (another kind of held note). In fact, arabesques actually do cast shadows. And as George Balanchine showed in his 1928 *Apollo*, they are like rays of sun.

Dancers, of course, need not think about the arabesque in such fanciful terms. They learn by example, trying on the signature arabesques of ballerinas, no two alike. And they fight for their own arabesque: the lift in the leg, the hold in the spine, the continuous, coursing energy required to keep the toe pointed and the shoulders from slipping open like a loose door. They fight to keep the arabesque alive. A good arabesque never gets easy.

And a great one is unforgettable. Margot

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Fonteyn's—unembellished, never higher than the hip, but not giving an inch of what it had—was English iconography. Moira Shearer's really did look like a leap from a balcony (she of *The Red Shoes* fame). On film, Russia's Natalia Dudinskaya shows a power forging through the hip that is practically continental, like the coming of cold. Irina Kolpakova of the Kirov? Her light, slim, big arabesque was a maiden's search through silver birches. And let's not forget Gelsey Kirkland's diminutive, driven arabesque (she who wrote *Dancing on My Grave*): taut, fraught, her pink toe-tip dipped in curare.

Suzanne Farrell's arabesque embodied an era (the Farrell Era). Huge, unforced, eternally new-looking, it could be cool and blinding—blizzard white—or balmy, a white night. You could live in it if you had to. After Farrell retired, Maria Calegari carried the flame—a small golden one compared to Farrell's blue flare. Calegari reminded me of a dictionary drawing of the "parabola," her lifted leg taking its momentum from the tensile U in the small of her back. When she performed that stationary, hand-turned arabesque in Balanchine's *Serenade*, her persimmon hair down around her shoulders, her arabesque rising like a tightening bow, she was goddess Diana securing a cliff top. Kyra Nichols, who is now the reigning ballerina at New York City Ballet, has everything but a memorable arabesque. Perhaps that is why her command has been so retiring, so lacking in ceremony.

Where are the great arabesques? This is the question that slowly formed in my mind, expanding to fill the available space left by the spring season's handful of banal new ballets. At NYCB, Peter Martins can no longer make a choreographic ripple. His ballets, whatever the idiom, are increasingly unmusical and indistinct; divorced, it feels, from warm-blooded classicism (they're test-tube ballets). Kevin O'Day, a former Twyla Tharp dancer who has been a quick hit as a choreographer, makes aggressive little Gen X dances, Calvin Klein ads dressed in glam black and trapped in a kaleidoscope. As with this season's *Badchonim* (merry-makers), they wow the audience with their zip and symmetry but require no commitment at all from the dancers. At American Ballet Theatre, the revolving door spun and swept Jiri Kylian back into the Metropolitan Opera with a New Age, or Old Egypt, ritual called *Stepping Stones*—solemn, sinewy, po-mo, pompous. There was also a new Tharp wiggle-world, *The Elements*, and a pretty but inconsequential production of *Cinderella* borrowed from the Houston Ballet.

The companies didn't play up the premieres. Their focus was on young dancers—new girls and star boys. And anyway, one no longer expects a communicative piece of choreography. Premieres post-Balanchine haven't been hot events since Baryshnikov left ABT, Mark Morris plateaued, and Twyla Tharp turned into her own bowl-cut cottage industry. Debuts are what's left. Huge hopes get pinned to kids barely out of the academy—young things from the School of American Ballet or the Ukraine. Premature hopes. This year, the NYCB "It Girl" is Maria Kowroski. At ABT, it's Paloma Herrera.

Maria Kowroski was already talked about last year, but she broke into important roles this spring, receiving raves. I went time and again to figure out what the fuss was about and saw a very long, very loose-jointed dancer with pretty, rather glassy good looks. In a performance of *Symphony in C*—the second, jewel-box movement—Kowroski was like melting taffy, overextended and going weak. Was this a clueless performance or a terrified one? By her first attempt at Terpsichore (in *Apollo*), Kowroski had pulled herself together and marked through the ballet without incident. I say "marked" because she wasn't exactly dancing—she was getting the steps right. Unhinged again in *The Prodigal Son*, Kowroski's Siren slam-danced the poor Prodigal.

Kowroski will improve. She will learn to get through ballets in one piece. She has an instrument. What one doesn't see is technique invested with a personality. Indeed,

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Kowroski's arabesque is a rubbery type that is increasingly the norm at NYCB (is it becoming state of the art?). A trombone slide into height that's out of sync with a composed whole, this arabesque has no interior opposition and therefore no dynamics—it's a trick arabesque. The perennially promising Margaret Tracey and the double-jointed Diana White are of a kind with Kowroski. These are big arabesques, way above hip level, but they are not good ones. An antidote arabesque came in *Who Cares?* It was the parallel-to-ground, swift spear of senior ballerina Merrill Ashley (Who cares? She cares!) Complete clarity is more impressive than automatic height.

Compared to Kowroski, the raven-haired, twenty-year-old Argentinean Paloma Herrera is vividly present, and she really does have a textbook technique. Her proportions are as perfect as Kowroski's, though on a smaller scale—short yet supple from waist to shoulder, extra long from hip to toe—and she has a strength that rarely accompanies these proportions. Furthermore, she's a textbook drawing in three dimensions; there's a sense of curve and volume in her dancing, a palpable roundness in her head-on attack. Her long arched pointes grab ground like talons. I liked Herrera better as a budding soloist, when she had more glow and desire, as well as more weight. Now catapulted to the top of the roster, it's as if she's set her jaw and locked her mind.

One of the few gifts Herrera was not granted is an easy smile, though it used to be easier and more charming. As Kitri in *Don Quixote*, she was in a snit rather than high spirited, grudgingly happy. Trying to live up to her star status, she punctuates heavily, selling stunts when she should be exploring the music (even bad music). Like a slot machine hitting the jackpot, Herrera hits her balances with a *ker-chink!*, holding them through wobble and sway like an exaggerated vibrato, sending the audience weirdly wild. In this she was abetted by partners who are right for her in stature (Julio Bocca, Angel Corella) but wrong in spirit. If Herrera has the potential to be more than a Technique Machine—which is what ABT's Susan Jaffe has become, having been given the same rush in her ingenue years—she should be allowed to find out now, not goaded into circus work with Tasmanian Devils in dance belts. The modest, plummy, loving performance she gave four seasons ago in Ashton's *Symphonic Variations* is a kind of dancing now lost to her.

But as spring progressed there were signs of return. Mid season, Herrera did not oversell her solo in the Rose Adagio from *The Sleeping Beauty*, a part built around balances on pointe, and her *Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux* with Corella grew lighter, more musically spontaneous. And throughout the whole season, even during the most discouraging grandstanding, there was Herrera's arabesque—undeniably superb, utterly dependable, a lush physics that might have been devised by Oppenheimer in a moment of whimsy. Julie Kent, of the Wedgewood beauty, the couturish bones and pale tones, is more gorgeously inventive than Herrera. Amanda McKerrow is more refined. But neither has an arabesque that can compete with Herrera's for might, security, the infrastructural play of opposing forces, curves sprung tight inside angles. Kent's inconsistency in this step—her arabesque line large and ecstatic in *Romeo and Juliet*, brittle and smack up against her limitations in *Swan Lake*—spoke to her technical inconsistency all around, a disappointment in a dancer with so much imagination. McKerrow's season was simply off, her arabesque rarely square, authority slipping out the door. But Herrera's arabesque—it kept bringing me back to her and to the question: Will it ever be the summation of an expressive whole?

That kind of arabesque belonged to but one person this season, a man, ABT's Vladimir Malakhov. For possibly the first time in this century, men's arabesques were more compelling than women's (I'm thinking also of NYCB's Ethan Stiefel and Igor Zelensky). The spring '96 season in general

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belonged to the men; Lincoln Center could have flown a flag tagged "Where the Boys Are." And ballet management played up the testosterone: Balanchine's nod to masculine splendor, *Apollo*—with its big, juicy, heroic role—was in repertory at both NYCB and ABT, an unusual occurrence. Many men danced it, though rarely more than once (leaving no chance for skill to build). Still it was fascinating to see such a variety of types chisel into that ice-white iconography. As if to stress the tipping scales between gender, a program conflict cropped up early in the season, leaving the unhappy choice: Julie Kent at ABT in Tudor's *The Leaves Are Fading* or Ethan Stiefel at NYCB in *Apollo*. These were long awaited debuts for both dancers. With Stiefel soon to leave NYCB for a European company, I went to *Apollo*. (Quite reasonably, another critic I know chose Kent *because* Stiefel was leaving, rendering his performance "an experiment in a void.")

When I first came to care about classical dance, I paid no attention to male dancers. Ballet was turnout and toe shoes and women had both, while men, with their tighter, narrower pelvises, could hardly muster half as much rotation in the hips, and of course didn't go on pointe. By college I did care about male dancers. Nureyev was a household word, and Baryshnikov had just defected. But even then, I only loved Rudi for his love of ballet. Because men didn't have the turnout, they just didn't have the territory of women—or the poetic power. Baryshnikov, plush in turnout, with a stately, plump arabesque, was the exception that proved the rule.

In the persons of Vladimir Malakhov and Ethan Stiefel, however, we are now seeing male dancing based on a fully rotated and integrated, almost female, turnout. When male strength meets such technical refinement the result is jawdropping clarity—a kind of enchantment. Stiefel is never better than in magic-forest ballets like *Valse Fantaisie*, *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *The Sleeping Beauty* Act Two; in roles of classical scale this smallish dancer seems to grow a foot, phrasing daringly, leaving the limits of tradition behind. His arabesque is ardent. In more prosaically scaled work (Robbins, Martins) Stiefel can seem slight, under-engaged. He needs classicism.

And Malakhov. When you first see this dancer set foot upon the stage, though blonde and not overly muscled, you can't help thinking Rudi. He has the deliberate, pantherine walk—that sexy gravity—*and* the stage-bound self-containment. When he enters for the balcony scene of *Romeo and Juliet*, the cape is redundant—he's already caped in concentration. Clive Barnes called him a "Rudi wannabe," sarcasm that missed the larger point. Malakhov is more important for the ways he's unlike Rudi. Where Nureyev brought dark force to his dancing, Malakhov brings lightness, restraint. Where Nureyev dragged sexuality into the picture, Malakhov can seem beyond it. And unlike Nureyev, he's not out to conquer classical technique, he's in league with it. He can break your heart with a *tendu*.

Malakhov has feet any female would be pleased with; his demi-pointe (work on tiptoe) is sensitive, springy, fascinatingly feline. Heading into a leap he gets finer, feathery, lofting off the ball of his foot—not heavier as most men do. In every step Malakhov shows you the interior logic of ballet technique, its unique system of torsion, lift, and leverage. Not only does he have quintessentially pure "placement" (the solar plexus properly positioned over the hips), he enunciates through the torso with amazing equilibrium and nuance, bracing brazenly back into big air moves (as only Misha did), calibrating balances so that they look like expressions of idealism. This fluid and articulate discipline gives Malakhov a special phosphorescence. He glows in the dark. And I like the way Malakhov has absorbed both Nureyev and Baryshnikov into his system—making for yet another electric opposition. When Malakhov's on stage, everyone stands up straighter, high on his high.

There are those who feel Malakhov's best

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move is his *grand jeté* and in his body it is a thing of surreal beauty. Soaring in a perfect split, he has a particularly arresting way of just floating at the top—a countertenor who's hit his zone—super-suspending the moment with a gentle gesture of the palms, as if silencing the sky. Still, I think his alabaster arabesque comes first. Partly there's the shock of seeing it on a man. Partly there is Malakhov's deep belief in it. This arabesque has aura—an Apollonian symmetry and sensation of ascent (the arabesque design, it turns out, first appeared in Hellenistic times).

And yet, despite what would seem to be a natural fit, Malakhov—and Stiefel as well—looked disconnected from the role of Apollo, as if technique was getting in the way. It is well known that Balanchine viewed this Apollo as a rough young god. The role was choreographed for Serge Lifar, a rough young Russian with not much turnout or finish. The man who commanded the role of Apollo this season was Igor Zelensky, a large, rough-hewn dancer with a mountain-range arabesque, simple but good, and upper-body strength to burn. The audience still prefers this kind of macho, and in the first round of Apollos, I preferred Zelensky, too. The sheer size of his commitment was moving.

Apollo is an allegory about the making of a dancer, an artist, and the centrality of *Apollo* this season is an allegory in its own right. In this ballet, man is the center of the universe; women are handmaid, mother, or muse. The role of Terpsichore is equal to Apollo's, but only if the dancer makes it so, and none did. It is a curious time in classical dance when men seem the center of its universe, when women are stuck while men are evolving. What could account for this? Well, to the novice audience, male virtuosity is a good deal more accessible than female. It's certainly easier to market. (Hence the hyping of that little twister Angel Corella, an eager talent, too eagerly sacrificing alignment for bravura.) More insidiously, it is easier for today's choreographers to create for men: men don't have the female's historical/metaphorical baggage (they were never handmaids, mothers, or muses), men don't possess that parallel universe—pointe. Twyla Tharp, for example, reconstituted her cloying ballet from last year, *Americans We*, by upping the masculinity quotient and dropping Corella into its center. Now it's whiz-bang rousing. Her new ballet *The Elements* comes suddenly into focus, plugged in, whenever men take center stage. Women are too complicated, caught in limbo between a rich poeticized past and the meaningless postmodern moment. What do ballerinas want? I used to feel I knew. What's missing? Choreographers who care about arabesque.

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The media

Joe Klein's tangled web

by James Bowman

It is a not-entirely frivolous question to ask, in the context of this journal's celebration of the European past, if the affair of Joe Klein, author of *Primary Colors*, the best-selling novel about the Clinton campaign for president in 1992, has anything to teach us about what the historian Peter Laslett once called "The World We Have Lost." For it is not only the written (or painted, sculpted, etc.) record of the European past that we ought properly to value, but the largely unwritten traditions—involving honor and propriety, what is worthy of emulation and what is not—out of which these artifacts may be said to have sprung. It is because we have given too little attention to these matters that when Joe Klein was forced, after having been identified by a handwriting expert employed by *The Washington Post*, to admit to his authorship, there was no generally agreed upon standard of behavior according to which his previous concealment of it could be judged.

The result was the usual comedy that attends the not-infrequent displays of self-righteousness by the "journalistic community." Greed, envy, and self-importance jostled for the upper hand as the professional wordsmiths sought to find ever more grand-sounding rationales for their indignation at the fact that Klein had lied to them. "No one begrudges him the money," said Mark Halperin of ABC News. "No one begrudges him doing it anonymously in the beginning to protect himself. But on a personal level, many of his friends who asked him directly feel hurt because they're not used to being lied to repeatedly about something they came to care about a great deal."

Just consider for a moment the assumption behind such a statement. I say to a casual friend (that is, one to whom I have no special obligation of trust): Are you sleeping with your secretary? Or have you ever had VD? Or what do you *really* think of your brother-in-law? If he doesn't answer me truthfully, does that mean he's lying? Of course not. He has every right to tell me to mind my own business. And if saying "Mind your own business" implies an answer he does not want to give, he has every right to lie. The evil of lying is not, in the solemnly Platonic circumlocution of Swift's Houyhnhnms, "saying the thing which is not"—something that everyone recognizes is sometimes permissible, even obligatory—but in the breach of trust. Where there is no obligation of trust, there can be no breach of trust. And a journalist who grills an unwilling source for information, information which will harm the source or his friends but will advance the interests of the journalist and *his* friends, can claim no obligation of trust to enforce the truth from him.

Back in the days when a general idea of honorable behavior, inherited from thousands of years of European history, was part of an educated man's standard moral equip-

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ment this would have been no difficult concept to grasp. But now that that sense of honor has gone, along with so much else from the European past, we have nothing to fall back on but a quasi-Marxist calculus of whose interest is "objectively" served and various sorts of humbug designed to disguise the naked cynicism of that calculus. So in the case of Joe Klein's lying, the humbug consists in the journalistic conceit that the profession is dedicated to the disinterested pursuit of the truth. Thus it is that such people as Mark Halperin think that the mere asking of a question creates the presumptive right to a truthful answer.

The only thing more absurd than the self-righteousness of Klein's journalistic pursuers was his own self-righteousness in answering them. In his press conference, for example, just after having been unmasked, he attempted to turn the tables on his questioners by saying that his subterfuge fell within a recognized category of justified deception: "I felt that there are times when I've had to lie to protect a source, and I put this in that category." Or, as Rowan Scarborough in *The Washington Times* put it, "Mr. Klein justified his deception by saying he was just protecting a source—himself." But he soon recognized the untenability of this position and offered up groveling apologies, not only for "lying" but for having *said* that he might lie to protect a source.

Howard Kurtz, in *The Washington Post*, offers an account of Klein's subsequent apology to his *Newsweek* colleagues:

> With tears in his eyes and his voice cracking, Klein apologized to the staff for dragging *Newsweek* into the controversy over his secret authorship of "Primary Colors." He praised the magazine and said he was "deeply sorry."
>
> "It was extremely emotional and pretty wrenching to sit through," a top editor said. "He was genuinely tortured." Said another: "This is what people have been waiting for."

There is perhaps just the hint of the Moscow show trials here in the need for the victim publicly to confess and humiliate himself. Kurtz quotes a "veteran staffer" as saying that many of his colleagues "had been pushing him to try to be more contrite. Today," the veteran added with self-satisfaction, "was the first time I felt it was really sincere."

If there were any further doubts about his sincerity, Klein must have cleared them up when he told Kurtz in a telephone interview that "he now has more sympathy for politicians," because "the intensity of the spotlight is so distorting and so difficult to deal with as a human being that we don't know what we're playing with." In fact, he had said something similar even before his discovery, in a piece written by "Anonymous" for *The New York Times Book Review* in May:

> People who've never read the book have speculated with great authority about who wrote it. I realize that I've been the commercial beneficiary of all this, and that much of it was inevitable, but it's still been pretty perverse and occasionally nauseating. Too late, I gained a better sense of how Jack Stanton must have felt as the witless, ravenous pack descended on him in New Hampshire.

Now there's a curious argument: if he had known how it felt to be a celebrity, he might not have been so hard on the celebrities in his book—and so might not have come to be a celebrity himself! It just goes to show you what knots Klein tied himself into in order to claim the absolution which is always on offer from the press for those who expose their (never *too* discreditable) feelings in public. His very reasonable desire to protect his own privacy had to be not just waived (retrospectively) but identified as horribly wrong. In fact, of course, it is only detrimental to a juicy story. But having identified it as evil he could then stake his claim to sympathy for the psychic damage committing such an evil had done him.

So he claimed that his deception of his *Newsweek* colleagues was "one of the most difficult things I've ever done in my life"

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and, when he faxed them a handwritten note of apology, it was to let them know that

> I had to make some very complicated decisions. . . . It's been a lonely, agonizing run these past few months—but it would be fatuous for me to complain too much, given the success achieved.
>
> But it came with a price and to the extent that you had to pay part of that price—the energy expended defending me against a vicious, witless [that word again!], disproportionate assault—I deeply regret it.

And what exactly was the "vicious, witless, disproportionate assault"? What (given that not many of them are defending him now) could it be but the speculation that he was —as in fact he was—the author? Well, maybe not so witless after all!

At least he has the good grace to catch just the merest glimpse of the "fatuous" nature of complaining about his "agonizing" *enrichissement*—although not enough of one to make him excise the fatuity, apparently. In the same vein, he wrote to Andrew Heyward, the head of CBS News, resigning his commentary slot, that

> this has been a confusing and exhausting few weeks for me—and I feel a strong need to simplify my life at this point. Specifically, I believe it would be extremely difficult to continue to keep my commitments to both *Newsweek* and CBS for the rest of this election year.

In the case of CBS there *was* a breach of trust—as arguably there was when Maynard Parker of *Newsweek*, who was in on the secret, allowed the magazine's readers to suppose that he (or it) wasn't. But the failure to make distinctions between these cases and those where Klein lied merely to frustrate idle curiosity means that he is in a way off the hook: he can appeal to his own suffering for a blanket pardon.

Of course he can't really suppose that Heyward gives a rap if he is confused and exhausted, any more than his colleagues at *Newsweek* are filled with compassion for his "lonely, agonizing run." It's just that, lacking a language of honor, he—and we—have nothing left but the language of therapy for dealing with such matters. To be sure, this therapeutic tongue carries with it a certain delicacy which is analogous to old-fashioned politeness. It won't do, for example, for Mr. Heyward to say, as his counterpart a hundred years or so ago would have said, "D--- your exhaustion, Sir!" He's got to pretend to be sympathetic, just as Klein has got to pretend to agonies of conscience which he clearly never felt until he was required to do so.

In other words, there is lying going on all round, but it is an acceptable kind of lying and one which it would be churlish and cynical for those with vague memories of a more manly standard of conduct to point out. So it is natural even for the injured parties to adopt the therapeutic jargon in reply. Richard M. Smith, Klein's boss at *Newsweek*, took him to task in the following terms:

> The issue that has caused concern here is the repeated and emphatic denials. I know in looking back on it, Joe shares some of those concerns, too. Joe and I have talked about all aspects of this. It's been a good give-and-take, and we agree on most things.

In other words, this was something that our employee should not have done; but he feels bad about it, and I feel bad about it and "we agree on most things." What more can we ask of them?

Such transparent attempts to disarm criticism are obviously undertaken, just as Klein's initial deception was, with commercial motives. Such motives are not themselves necessarily discreditable to either one—any more than it automatically lends substance to Klein's critics when they remind us that he has so far made more than six million dollars out of *Primary Colors*. But in both cases, the fact of a pecuniary interest

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ought to have warned off a great many of the solemn moralists of the media who have pronounced on the question of Klein's "journalistic ethics"—or, perhaps, on even weightier matters.

A particularly good example is Richard Turner of *New York*. This is a magazine which itself has an interest in the matter as Joe Klein's former employer and as the first publication to unmask him, with the help of a stylometric study by Professor Donald Foster of Vassar. Klein's vehement denials of Foster's conclusions not only kept the deception alive for months but reserved for *Newsweek*'s corporate stablemate, *The Washington Post*, the honor of uncovering it. You can understand why the folks at *New York* might be left with a bitter taste in their mouths. Turner takes a real postmodern view of the scandal. To him it is all a tempest in a teacup, but he is annoyed and irritated that saying so "plays into somebody's spin"—to wit, that of CBS and *Newsweek*, who minimize the threat to their credibility by insisting that "it is important to remember that this isn't a matter of national security or affairs of state," or that it is "closer to 'Who shot J.R.?' than to the Pentagon Papers."

Rather than finding himself flacking for Klein's current employers, Turner adopts a tone of leaden solemnity about "some increasingly delicate issues involving the growing confluence of journalism and celebrity, the overlapping and sometimes conflicting pursuits of the modern omni-media 'content provider.'" But as a friend and former colleague of Klein's, Turner is unable to reach any definite conclusion, taking two thousand words finally to get round to saying: "I don't know how much I buy the argument that Klein besmirches the journalism profession, but he's definitely crossed a line" and that "I'm not saying it's wrong for print reporters to be commentators on TV, for editors to socialize with the rich and powerful, for the converging media to put journalists in less-detached and more awkward places. But everybody had better be very careful."

Just by the bye, what about *that* as shameful journalism? If you haven't got anything more to say on a serious moral issue than that "everybody had better be very careful," hadn't you better apologize to the reader for wasting his time? But of course the absolute right of well-paid hacks to fill column inches has never been questioned in any part of the "debate" on journalistic ethics. Philosophers like Turner, or Richard Harwood of *The Washington Post*, write turgid and self-important pieces on the subject without ever realizing that the only ethical issue of any real interest is their own and their colleagues' self-importance.

Harwood, for example, begins by saying that "the unmasking of *Newsweek*'s Joe Klein as the author of *Primary Colors* could open a broad discussion of lying and deception in the practice of journalism in America," but he doubts that it will. He then goes on to quote Janet Malcolm's now famous indictment of her profession as "morally indefensible" and comments, trenchantly, that "that is too sweeping, too harsh." Sissela Bok, on the other hand, a philosopher and author of a book called *Lying*, may be on to something when she says that it is the habit of lying which is the pernicious thing about it. The problem, says Harwood, is that even good journalists, like Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, admit to lying and don't agonize enough about it. He ends with the characteristically dull assertion that "the journalism establishment" must deal "honestly and openly with the ethics and morality of what we do and how we do it" or "nothing much will change."

Clearly, Harwood's muddled view of lying is also characteristic of "the journalistic community." And of Klein himself, perhaps. Was it significant that, at one point in his self-defense, he said, in the Bob Dole-style third person, "Joe Klein has never lied in a column. And will never, at least not knowingly"? If a lie is told not knowingly it is by definition not a lie. But Klein seems to think that a lie is the same thing as a mistake or a mis-statement. It is one measure of the absurdly overinflated notion of themselves

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that journalists have that they appear to suppose that what they write, and what the next day wraps the garbage, is or ought to be the equivalent of Holy Writ.

It is true to say that there is a serious issue of Klein's credibility as a political commentator, if not as a journalist. Members of the Clinton administration, to whom Klein has been less than kind lately, were quick to seize upon his weakness. "Remember, again," said Mike McCurry, the President's spokesman, "for us he wrote a piece of fiction and that's how we treat it. I think Joe Klein's shown that he's capable of writing fiction." Similarly, George Stephanopolous remarked that Klein "was projecting his dishonesty onto the Clintons. When he talks about *their* problems with credibility, trust, and veracity, he's accusing them of something he did." Ann Lewis of the Clinton-Gore campaign was quoted as saying that Klein is a person who "writes a book, flat-out denies what he did, is confronted with the evidence, and says 'no comment.' How would a political journalist write about a political figure who behaved that way?"

Although this kind of comment may be a problem for Joe Klein if he intends to continue as a commentator, it is not really a problem for the rest of us, who are in a pretty good position to judge for ourselves who has the most problems with "credibility, trust, and veracity." Nor is it even a problem for the "journalistic community," though many journalists think it is because they have spent their lives living a lie of their own: the lie that they are fair and unbiased observers of the political scene. It was the fear of finding their own halos tarnished, probably even more than envy and jealousy, which energized so many of Klein's critics. It is the fear that their readers might be allowed to discover that they, too, have human passions and political beliefs.

Perhaps it might even be revealed that some of them have a Klein-like indignation at the cynical and corrupt behavior of the politicians they cover. If the expression of such indignation would be an honorable act, does that mean that concealing it, so as to pretend that one is godlike in one's professional ability to rise above such passions, is a dishonorable one? I think our European ancestors would have been able to tell us.

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Books

Recasting virtue

by Hadley Arkes

The sobering recognition, now finally settling in, is that Bill Clinton was not an accident—a solecism cast up by the electoral system when Mr. Ross Perot managed to split the Republican vote. It becomes more and more apparent that Bill Clinton is a reflection of something in the American character, and the public reaction to Clinton offers a precise reflection, at this moment, of the national soul. According to some recent surveys, about 54 percent of the public do not think that Bill Clinton could be considered "honest and trustworthy." But the same surveys also report that about 62 percent of the public think that he has honesty and integrity enough to serve as President. Mr. Clinton may have—shall we say?—an infirm sense of truth, but nothing in this vice is thought to disqualify him for his public office. The discrepancy can be explained only if the public has now absorbed, deeply, this kind of distinction: the fact that Clinton has serious moral deficits, or a want of virtue, does not mean that he is wanting in the virtues of a political man, in the exercise of power.

What has taken place is a recasting of "virtue" in its application to politics, or a radical change in the understanding of "morality" in public life. Plato had Socrates say in the *Gorgias* that before we give an architect a commission to build a *public* building, we look at his portfolio to see what *private* buildings he has done: before we entrust a man with public authority, or power over the rest of us, we look seriously into his private life, to see if he has shown any notable aptitude for justice in his dealings with those people who come within his reach. When did we learn to make a distinction between private and public morality, or between morality and politics? The answer is that we learned at the hand of the same man who taught us to take a posture of detachment, or moral indifference, in the presence of vice. Or the one who taught us that the artful ruler in politics must "learn how not to be virtuous." This understanding would have shocked the ancients, and this break from the classic tradition has been taken as the distinct "achievement" of Machiavelli.

Professor Harvey C. Mansfield notes in his new book, *Machiavelli's Virtue*,[1] that Machiavelli "began a project, later picked up and developed by other modern philosophers, for a permanent, irreversible improvement in human affairs establishing a new political regime. The project is often called 'modernity.'" The late Leo Strauss once observed that we would "expose ourselves to good-natured or any rate harmless ridicule, if we profess ourselves inclined to the old-fashioned and simple opinion according to which Machiavelli was a teacher of evil." What Machiavelli offered, said Strauss, was

1 *Machiavelli's Virtue*, by Harvey C. Mansfield; University of Chicago Press, 314 pages, $29.95.

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a primer containing the "maxims of public and private gangsterism":

> What other description would fit a man who teaches lessons like these: princes ought to exterminate the families of rulers whose territory they wish to possess securely; princes ought to murder their opponents rather than to confiscate their property since those who have been robbed, but not those who are dead, can think of revenge; men forget the murder of their fathers sooner than the loss of their patrimony; true liberality consists in being stingy with one's own property and in being generous with what belongs to others; not virtue but the prudent use of virtue and vice leads to happiness.

These maxims would no longer startle, because they have been incorporated in our sense of "political realism," or the way the world works. Machiavelli no longer shocks, because his premises have become ours. Professor Mansfield, the Kenan Professor of Government at Harvard, has taken, as the title of his book, the meaning of "virtue" in Machiavelli, and yet he does not offer to the reader a single, crisp definition of the term. Nor does he spend his pages in drawing out, systematically, its implications. He understands, rather, that the notion of virtue will illuminate the whole of Machiavelli's teaching: Machiavelli could not recast the meaning of virtue without recasting the meaning of morality itself and the understanding of the ends, or purposes, of political life. Mansfield treats the idea of virtue then as a thread, which he is prepared to follow through all of the intricate turns offered by an intricate and subtle writer, who also takes it, as a part of his art, to be as deft in what he conceals as in what he teaches openly. Mansfield observes at different moments that "virtue in [Machiavelli's] new meaning seems to be a prudent or well-taught combination of vice and virtue in the old meaning," or that virtue means, not moral norms lasting through the ages, but "flexibility according to the times or situations." In short, the "virtue" of a political man is the capacity to produce an "effect," to achieve his ends in an arresting way, without being inhibited by moral restraints.

In a style reminiscent of Leo Strauss, Mansfield is prepared to follow the threads of his problem through the works of Machiavelli line by line, and even between the lines—he is prepared, that is, to be as patient and refined as the mind he is seeking to track and understand. In this project, he has also persevered; the book brings together essays that have mapped his paths of reflection over the past thirty years. At times, he becomes so refined that he may be speaking mainly to himself, and yet his observations remain, for all of that, good talk. By the end, he emerges from this writing, exquisitely patient and refined, with lessons for our current politics that are both apt and unsettling. The ground, one would think, is ancient and familiar, but Mansfield manages to draw out some understandings, or recognitions, jarringly new.

In recasting the problem of politics, Machiavelli began by collapsing the differences that were regarded as the most decisive in political life, the differences among political regimes. His special achievement here was to collapse the difference between republics and principalities—between the rule of the many and the rule of one. As Mansfield put it, "The ruling part is always the same, and only the relation of princes to each other and of princes to the people discloses the nature of the regime." A regime of "consent" would satisfy the multitude by meeting their deepest concern, the concern for security and their fear of being governed. A government ruling in the name of the people will induce the people to accept more readily the yoke of being governed. But regardless of the forms, government will always be in the hands of a few, who will always be, in effect, "princes," no matter how they are styled. And even a government republican in form may gratify the "humors" of those who rule—namely, their passion for glory, fame, or as we say in tamer times, "recognition."

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Machiavelli understood that even a republic would need to be renewed, to be shaken occasionally from its settled conventions, and the instrument of rejuvenation he would find in "sensational executions" (*esecuzioni*). In fact, the fascination and utility of *esecuzioni* provides a pervading theme in his work. To rule was to "execute" with "effect"—not only to produce the desired result, but to make an impression on the public mind. It also meant to execute in the sense of punish, and punishment, too, had its utility. For it could at once plant fear and assuage anger. The premier example in Machiavelli, the example that told all, was that of Cesare Borgia in the province of Romagna. Cesare had installed Remirro de Orco, a "cruel, efficient" man, to rule as his agent. When the severities of this rule had stirred hatred, Cesare decided to purge the anger in a stroke by purging his minister. One morning, as Machiavelli recounted, Remirro's body was found in the piazza, cut in two, with a block of wood and a bloody knife. "The brutality of this spectacle," he said, kept the people for a time "appeased and stupefied."

The dark secret, which may not speak its name, is that this capacity to carry out hard executions is the very stuff of the executive power, and the executive power is the heart of modern government. To preserve the Union, Lincoln had to suspend the Writ of Habeas Corpus, and though he acted with moderation—and with ample readiness to forgive his enemies—he had to prosecute the war, in the end, with deadly force. That we refer to such power as the "Executive" power is itself part of the fiction cast up by politics in its modern form: we pretend that this power of the ruler is not exerted in his own name, for his own ends. We assume rather that he is "executing" a policy springing from the will of the people, or that he is carrying out the mandates of the Constitution. But the insight of Machiavelli—the insight that Mansfied appears to confirm—is that "the law cannot attain what it attempts." The law speaks in universal terms, but the law "needs assistance from outside to specify what is reasonable in each case." Before there was a declaration of war, President Roosevelt authorized the American navy to shoot at German submarines in the Atlantic. And before there was a statute providing for the seizure of property, FDR ordered the seizure of an aircraft plant, halted in its production by a strike. When the Constitution gets in the way of the "necessity" of defense, the Constitution becomes exposed as but a paper parchment. What is revealed as real, as inescapably of this world, is the power of the Executive, or the hand of the ruler.

One of the memorable pictures of my childhood was the photo of Mr. Sewell Avery, in his chalk-stripe, double-breasted suit, still sitting in his chair as the head of the corporation at Montgomery Ward, as two soldiers carried him out and placed him in an army truck. The federal government had just laid hands on the corporation—and Mr. Avery—rather than see the company close down its operations as a result of a strike, in the middle of the war. What everyone could see in the scene was the long arm of Franklin Roosevelt. And that reach ever more impressed and "stupefied" because it did not have to be seen in the photo in order to be sensed or apprehended.

That is what Machiavelli understood about the reality of modern government: that it is the hand of the ruler, working under the fictions of the law. That the point still comes as news, that it still may surprise even our savviest public men, is the measure of what Machiavelli still may teach. It is also the measure of what still may jolt us in the news that Mansfield brings. And so, at the end of a rather mean term of the Supreme Court, Justice Scalia could speak with exasperation of his colleagues: "The court must be living in another world. Day by day, case by case, it is busy designing a Constitution for a country I do not recognize." Scalia is moved to outrage because, in his earnestness, he is still attached to the precious notion that we have a "government of laws," an impersonal regime of

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rules, described in the Constitution. And that regime, he persists in thinking, may be used, with a spirit of tolerance, to accommodate a wide variety of political ends, so long as they gain the consent of the people. Scalia professes to be offended then when his colleagues seem determined simply to get their way. They will adapt the formulas or the slogans of the Constitution, they will draw upon the words as they need them, to supply at least a plausible cover for the results they wish to produce. Mansfield would no doubt share Scalia's outrage, but not his astonishment. As Machiavelli taught, the political class, the people who form the regime, will get their way, and they will bend the law to their ends. What stirs the incredulity of Scalia would merely confirm the deep truth that Machiavelli sought to teach to his most attentive readers about a "new order of things," about the kind of government that would be formed around his new political science.

But it was also part of his teaching that this state of things, in order to have its effect, would have to be concealed. The assent of the multitude could not be gained so readily for a regime that made so brutally clear that it rested on the splendor of *uno solo*, of one man or a gifted few, acting out their passion to rule.

This truth about "modern government" would hold even more firmly as the problem of foreign policy and defense gained the ascendance over domestic policy. The perils of foreign policy, or the dangers arising from abroad, would make even more urgent the unconstrained hand of the Executive. In Mansfield's reading, that state of affairs would also move us further from the conditions of the polis in classical thought. "Even the ancients had to admit," he says, "that the good city . . . might have to subordinate its goodness and its concern for the soul to the requirements of self-defense."

Mansfield finds it telling in this vein that, throughout Machiavelli's work, there is almost no mention of the soul (*animo*). Following Machiavelli's own rules of interpretation, we must suspect that the silence of a wise man is instructive: when a wise man is silent on a matter that most other people regard as important, he leads us to suspect that he regards that matter as unimportant. Machiavelli's silence on the question of the soul could hardly have been inadvertent. A politics that takes seriously matters of the soul is directed to a moral understanding outside of politics. Mansfield touches the point precisely, and he offers an echo of John Paul II, when he observes that "conscience is the receptivity of the human soul to a higher law, a divine law." In a politics concerned with the soul, men in office would acknowledge a moral law outside themselves, a law that constrains their exercise of power. But that is exactly what Machiavelli meant to supersede as he swept past the classic polis, past the tradition of natural law, past Christianity and Judaism. As Leo Strauss noted, Machiavelli mentions in *The Prince* the Old Testament but not the New; he mentions Xenophon but not Plato or Aristotle. In short, the peaks are missing in the tradition of revelation and philosophy. Strauss drew the inference that Machiavelli meant to supply those peaks himself. He would put, in place of Christianity and ancient philosophy, a new understanding; he would become the founder of a new political order that would surpass both the classical polis and Christianity.

What he would produce then is a form of governance utterly emancipated from the restraints of law and morality. In the most guarded way, Mansfield brings us to the threshold of acknowledging that Machiavelli might have had it, inescapably, right: the restraints of law, the fictions of the Constitution, will have to give way to the Executive power. Mansfield decorously muffles the point for us by expressing the hope that even Machiavelli might have drawn back if he could have seen what his teaching would beget when it was allied with modern technology. "After our experience of totalitarian tyranny," says Mansfield, "[Machiavelli] might have shivered

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himself." But to "shiver" is not exactly the same as objecting on moral grounds. As Mansfield himself has made clear, there is nothing in the record of Stalin or Hitler that Machiavelli had not anticipated in principle; and in principle he had dissolved every ground of moral objection.

But that returns us then to Mansfield's own teaching. If the law is but a fiction, what is it that finally constrains the power of the Executive or the hand of the ruler? The old answer used to be the "character" of the ruler, or his respect for a law outside himself. Religion used to supply an anchor for the character of men in politics, for it led back, as Mansfield says, to a higher law, outside oneself. But as Mansfield understands, the silence of a wise man is always instructive, and in this serious work of political theory, Mansfield has almost nothing to say about religion. One might gather that he does not look to it seriously himself, or that he does not expect it to be taken seriously, in our own time, as a source of moral constraint. Then, what of a moral understanding not dependent on religion—say, the tradition of moral reasoning and "classic natural right"? Mansfield remarks in passing that Machiavelli had prepared the ground for modernity not only by rejecting, but by "refuting classical natural right." If these passages can be taken as clues, Mansfield has given us a teaching that is quite dark indeed. The Constitution and the forms of law will be but fictions, and behind them all will simply be the Executive power. But that power is now wielded in an age when our rulers no longer take seriously the notion of moral truths or natural law, and when they may pay only a lip service to Christianity. In a world so arranged, Machiavelli would be proven right to a degree that even Mansfield would suffer tremors in acknowledging.

But on the other hand, Mansfield's reticence may simply be a silent, prudent concession to the world that Machiavelli has made. It may not be that Mansfield is no longer persuaded himself of natural right, or of the truth borne by Christianity. It may be rather that, in the politics shaped by Machiavelli, in the world we inhabit now, a realistic doctrine of virtue may have to be conveyed as a covert teaching. It is not something that the urbane, in our day, will proclaim openly, and teach in public.

Empedocles at Dover

Nicholas Murray
A Life of Matthew Arnold.
Hodder & Stoughton,
400 pages, £20

reviewed by Paul Dean

Nicholas Murray tells his story well, in readable workmanlike prose, giving a particularly good account of Matthew Arnold's career as an inspector of schools. It is salutary to be reminded, in the words of the London *Times* obituary, that for thirty-five years the author of *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) earned his living by performing "the task of examining national schoolchildren in spelling, the rules of arithmetic, and plain sewing." (What a great Beerbohm cartoon that would have made—"Mr. Arnold Drops a Stitch.") For every thousand people who have read "Dover Beach" there must be only one who has read *Schools and Universities on the Continent*.

I am not that one, but Mr. Murray is, and his discussion of Arnold's educational thinking, so tellingly different in scope and emphasis from the revolution wrought by his father at Rugby, is very valuable. He did not fuss about the minutiae of the curriculum, but wanted a happy environment for the children, stimulating teaching, and recognition of the difficulties under which schoolteachers labored. With disinterested determination he campaigned against the scheme of payment by results for teachers, which his employers officially supported and which bids fair to return to the English educational scene today. All his better-known work was fitted in between journeys up and down the country, visits, reports,

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marking, and making fact-finding trips abroad. Mr. Murray remarks, "He is the patron saint of those who have struggled to do serious intellectual work at the same time as holding down a conventional job." This perhaps slights the educational profession, at least as represented by its best practitioners, but the general point is valid.

What Mr. Murray does not do is to engage critically with Arnold's abilities as poet and polemicist. He takes for granted that Arnold is a significant thinker and creative artist. He frequently refers disapprovingly to T. S. Eliot's disparaging verdicts that Arnold was "rather a propagandist for criticism than a critic" or that "in philosophy and theology he was an undergraduate; in religion a Philistine." Eliot was not, however, self-evidently wrong. Arnold was a good coiner of catch phrases (sweetness and light, Hebraism and Hellenism) but these turn out on examination to be merely verbal arrangements; his capacity for conceptual thinking was severely restricted. The satiric parts of *Culture and Anarchy* are successful, but when Arnold comes to offer his own prescription, we get little beyond moral uplift and the repetition of his mantras. His own culture remained narrowly bookbound and he never showed any interest in music or the visual arts.

Moreover, Arnold felt able to write his lectures *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (1867) without knowing any of that literature in the original, and, indeed, declared elsewhere that "the sooner the Welsh language disappears, the better," evincing a total blankness to the importance of national culture. Would he not have condemned this as provincialism in another writer? Again, his contempt for the nonconformist ethos—whether he was, as Mr. Murray insists, well-informed about it, or not—looks absurd when set against the testimony of writers such as George Eliot, Beatrice Webb, or D. H. Lawrence. They inhabited the world of tea-meetings and chapel services which Arnold found so vulgar, yet anyone who turns up the relevant biographies and autobiographies and discovers what they had read by their early twenties will not hastily convict them of intellectual or cultural myopia.

Arnold's critical essays retain some value. "On the Modern Element in Literature," "The Function of Criticism," and "The Study of Poetry" are important manifestos on which Eliot, despite his strictures, leaned heavily. Several of Arnold's formulations are classical, for instance his detection, in "The Study of Poetry," of the personal and historic fallacies, or his argument in "The Function of Criticism" that criticism "tends to establish an order of ideas, if not absolutely true, yet true by comparison with the order it displaces"—Eliot added nothing to this idea by rephrasing it, without acknowledgment, in "Tradition and the Individual Talent." On individual writers he was less sure. His essays on the Romantics still have much to offer—although his undervaluing of Keats is a blemish, especially when one realizes how much "The Scholar Gypsy" and "Thyrsis" are virtual centos from Keats's works. His insistence on the European dimension of literature is fresh and invigorating. Yet it remains inexcusable that he could judge Chaucer to have lacked "high seriousness" and to be "not one of the great classics" compared to Dante (another tip for Eliot). On the contrary, it is Chaucer and Dante who are European, while Arnold remains imperviously English.

Arnold notoriously predicted, at the beginning of "The Study of Poetry," that "most of what now passes with us for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry." In one sense he was right; one now finds theologians and philosophers who are keen to describe their disciplines in terms of metaphor, symbolism, or myth, and, of course, many literary critics are desperate to show that they are philosophers, too, if not theologians. Mr. Murray, however, defends the statement maladroitly. "At the end of the twentieth century," he says, "it is in the contemplation of art and literature rather than in religion, that the most serious imaginative and intellectual experiences of the

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secular *literati* occur." Apart from the unprovably sweeping nature of this assertion, and the number of questions begged by "most serious . . . experiences," one would expect "secular" thinkers, by definition, to have little sympathy with religion, so that the point becomes a tautology.

Still, Mr. Murray's confusions are as nothing compared to Arnold's. *St Paul and Protestantism* (1870), *Literature and Dogma* (1873), and *God and the Bible* (1875) must be the most inept ventures by a layman into Biblical criticism and theology which appeared during the nineteenth century. Arnold assumed that, as a man of culture, he had the intellectual equipment to pronounce upon matters that tax even those trained in the relevant disciplines. This was a misjudgment of almost heroic proportions. As an Oxford undergraduate, Arnold had been typically impressed by Newman's personal charm and style, while completely uninterested in the ideas of the Tractarian movement. His reaction to *Phases of Faith*, the painfully honest spiritual autobiography of Newman's brother Francis, is simply crass: "One would think to read him that inquiries into articles, biblical inspiration etc. etc. were as much the natural functions of man as to eat and copulate." If Francis Newman read Arnold's books he would surely have laughed immoderately.

A man who, wholly seriously, could define God as "the stream of tendency by which all things seek to fulfill the law of their being" or "the Eternal *not ourselves* which makes for righteousness," who could define religion as "morality touched with emotion," or who could describe the Church of England as "a great national society for the promotion of what is commonly called *goodness*" without being embarrassed, not by the inadequacy of the description, but by its damning truth, is clearly out of his depth. (Nowadays he would be an Anglican bishop.) R. H. Hutton, an unjustly neglected Victorian critic, annihilated the first part of *Literature and Dogma* when it appeared in the *Cornhill*. Writing in *The Spectator*, he pointed out how Arnold strove to empty the concept of God of all personality: "Unless the 'enduring power, not ourselves, that makes for Righteousness,' does so from love of righteousness, it is worthy of no emotion at all, and if it does so from love of righteousness, then it is, so far, precisely what we mean by personal."[1] There is a temptation to connect this need to make the deity impersonal with Arnold's lifelong attempt to emancipate himself from the literal and metaphorical presence of his father—a struggle which finds thinly veiled expression in the poem "Sohrab and Rustum." "Conduct," Arnold claimed in an effort to elide religion and ethics, "is three-fourths of life"—which recalls Dr. Arnold's statement of his priorities, when appointed headmaster of Rugby, as being to inculcate, in order, "1st, religious and moral principles; 2ndly, gentlemanly conduct; 3rd, intellectual ability." A beady-eyed despot who, Thomas Mozley unforgettably said, "seemed to live in a jungle, where every moving of the reeds was fearfully significant," he had given his crushing verdict on his son when the latter was still a schoolboy: "Matt does not know what it is to work because he so little knows what to think."

Arnold could be crushing in his turn; his comment on his father's death in 1842, that now the family had lost its "sole source of *information*," is stunningly frigid. Yet Dr. Arnold was right; Matthew never did know what to think. That may sound cruel, but he says much the same in the crucial lines from "Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse," in which he describes himself as "Wandering between two worlds, one dead,/ The other powerless to be born." R. H. Hutton remarked that this poem "expresses the melancholy of a mind preferring contemplation to action, and yet radically dissatisfied with the results of its own con-

1 The interested reader may be referred to an excellent collection edited by Robert Tener and Malcolm Woodfield, *A Victorian Spectator: Uncollected Writings of R. H. Hutton* (The Bristol Press, 1989).

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templation." Arnold knew that this was so. In his inaugural lecture as Professor of Poetry at Oxford, "On the Modern Element in Literature," delivered in 1857, he smuggles in some autobiography in the guise of a comment on Lucretius:

> There is no peace, no cheerfulness for him either in the world from which he comes, or in the solitude to which he goes. . . . The world in its fullness and movement is too exciting a spectacle for his discomposed brain. He seems to feel the spectacle of it at once terrifying and alluring.

This limbo state, with intellect and emotions pulling in opposite ways resulting in a paralysis of will and searing frustration, is everywhere in Arnold's temperament and poetry. His recurrent imagery of deep-welling rivers and his theme of the "buried life," his patent identification with his own Empedocles as a dormant volcano, his late poem "Growing Old" with its grim evocation of the shrunken heart and the inner glacier, all point the same way. "I am past thirty, and three parts iced over," he wrote to Clough in 1853, complaining of "*congestion of the brain*." Is it too fanciful to connect these images with the angina which had killed his father at forty-seven and (he knew he had inherited it) was to kill him at sixty-six? Pondering Mr. Murray's comment that Arnold was "kept in check by an efficient internal policing system," one recalls Ransome, the cook in Conrad's "The Shadow-Line," who, "carrying a deadly enemy in his breast," had "schooled himself into a systematic control of feelings and movements." Was this the subconscious cause of all that insistence on balance and harmony, on the folly of rashness or intemperance, on the need to strive for "the central, the truly human point of view"? "Mr. Arnold," Hutton remarked in his quietly devastating way, "only sees life steadily *at the cost of* seeing it whole."

If Arnold the prose writer has been overvalued, Arnold the poet deserves another look. (Mr. Murray is at his least effective when dealing with the poetry, on which his comments are summary-descriptive rather than analytical.) Arnold wrote to his sister in 1858: "People do not understand what a temptation there is, if you cannot bear anything not *very good*, to transfer your operations to a region where form is everything." With disarming frankness, Arnold admits that he has taken refuge in technique, knowing that the creative daring of genius is beyond him. His realistic estimate of himself, in a letter to his mother on the publication of his collected *Poems* (1869), compels agreement:

> My poems represent, on the whole, the main movement of mind of the last quarter of a century. . . . It might fairly be urged that I have less poetical sentiment than Tennyson, and less intellectual vigour and abundance than Browning; yet, because I have perhaps more of a fusion of the two than either of them, and have more regularly applied that fusion to the main line of modern development, I am likely enough to have my turn, as they have had theirs.

All this might seem to justify Eliot's verdict that Arnold is merely an accomplished academy poet. "Empedocles on Etna" he calls "one of the finest academic poems ever written." But in that poem Arnold dramatizes the conflict of classicism and modernism—of which he was to write in "On the Modern Element in Literature"—with a power that lifts him above respectability. Mr. Murray says of the lecture that Arnold "was not content to permit the disorder of multiple impressions or diverse points of view." This is not the case with the poem, in which the intellectual torment of Empedocles, which drives him to suicide in a last desperate attempt to revive his atrophied emotions by "becoming" the volcano, is juxtaposed with the world of lyrical harmony embodied in the songs of Callicles. When Empedocles laments that he is "a living man no more" but only "a devouring flame of thought . . . a naked, eternally

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restless mind," and when he aspires to "glow like this mountain," we hear Arnold's own yearning: yet the poem closes, not with Empedocles' self-immolation, the destruction which he believes is creation, but with Callicles' song of the Olympian impassivity of Apollo and the Muses, who go serenely on, indifferent to his fate.

> First hymn they the Father
> Of all things; and then,
> The rest of immortals,
> The action of men.
>
> The day in his hotness,
> The strife with the palm;
> The night in her silence,
> The stars in their calm.

Initially we assume that Callicles is, as he claims, Empedocles' comforter; but by the end of the poem we wonder whether he is not the insidious catalyst of the philosopher's desperation. The poem is Arnold's *Bacchae*, and ought to give pause to anyone wishing to relegate him to permanently minor status.

It was on April 15, 1888, that Arnold encountered what he had once brilliantly called, in a letter to Clough, "the deviceless darkness." He was in Liverpool, awaiting the arrival of his daughter and her family from America. Walking to catch a train to the docks, he had a heart attack and fell in the street, outside the house of a doctor. He died within a few minutes. In the doctor's opinion the attack had been precipitated by Arnold's excitement at the imminent reunion. There is a distressing irony here, about which Mr. Murray is, as throughout, delicately respectful. He is as committed and articulate an advocate as Arnold could have hoped for; yet there are depths he does not sound. Despite domestic happiness and public renown, there is something haunting and unfulfilled about Arnold's life which he seems to have predicted in "The Strayed Reveller": "Such a price/ The Gods exact for song:/ To become what we sing."

Expert testimony?

Peter Brooks & Paul Gewirtz, editors
Law's Stories: Narrative and Rhetoric in the Law. Yale University Press, 290 pages, $30

reviewed by Marc M. Arkin

In David Lodge's send-ups of academic life, scholarly pilgrims jet from conference to conference, searching for good weather, congenial cocktail hours, and some harmless jockeying for professional place. But no one ever took the events seriously enough to suggest publishing the papers they delivered. This, however, is a confessional age. No longer content with the private pleasures of a minor tax advantage, academics now feel impelled to share the results of their boondoggled holidays with the rest of us. *Law's Stories: Narrative and Rhetoric in the Law* is just such a book.

Touted by Yale University Press as an "important volume" and a "provocative and fascinating exploration of the entanglement of storytelling, the law, and justice in America," the book is an assemblage of twenty-one papers delivered by an assortment of well-known academics and various other guests at a symposium convened to discuss the currently hot topic of "narrative." It is academia's answer to commercial publishing's "instant book." Or, perhaps a hardcover publication is the price of getting this "stunning array of experts" (Yale's publicity kit again) to New Haven in the middle of February.

From the opening pair of essays by the volume's editors—Yale professors Peter Brooks (comparative literature) and Paul Gewirtz (law, but better known as Zoë Baird's husband)—to the closing pièce de résistance by none other than Catharine MacKinnon, the volume fairly strains with effort to celebrate the postmodern sensibility. Like so many interdisciplinary affairs these days, it promises literary critics trying to sound like law professors and law professors trying to sound like anything but

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law professors, all of them committed to "voicing the stories of the unvoiced" and "destabilizing dominant social narratives." It features essays grouped under the rubrics "Storytelling in Legal Discourse," "The Construction of Cases," "Excludable Stories," and "The Rhetoric of the Judicial Opinion." Despite these impressive titles, however, there is a good deal less here than meets the eye.

First of all, many of the participants appear more than mildly unsure of what the conference was supposed to be about. The writers resort to various strategems—easily recognized by those of us with long service in the academic trenches—to disguise their embarrassment. Some try the definitional route: mulling over the possible options without hazarding a conclusion. Others helpfully guess at what the organizers must have wanted. Still others simply write about something legal, however unrelated, with a few references to narrative sprinkled on top like parsley on an otherwise ordinary dish. As a variation on the last, some tell us everything they know, from Hegel to historiography, hoping to score a direct hit. But, whatever the stratagem, the end product is twenty-one disparate essays in search of a theme.

In fact, many of the participants simply opt for straightforward discussions of legal craft—as in, How to Cobble Together a Case Based on the Facts at Hand to Persuade a Judge or Jury. For example, Alan Dershowitz builds on Chekhov's advice to a novice writer—a gun hanging on the wall in Act One must be used by Act Three—to discuss how defense counsel must disrupt the flow of the prosecutor's narrative in a world in which jurors are disposed to think of life as having the orderly plot lines of fiction. (Mr. Dershowitz's contribution may be taken as an indication of the Simpson trial's recurring presence in the volume.)

Given how earnestly the narrative agenda is pressed as the conference's selling point, it is striking that contributor after contributor rejects the premise that in law, as in literature, the emotive force of stories trumps reason. Repeatedly, essayists assert that law cannot be treated as literature, since, among other things, law's coercive power obliges its practitioners to develop analytically satisfying arguments. In Judge Pierre Leval's words, it is a "flip abdication of duty" for a judge to substitute rhetoric for logic in an opinion, since reasoned explanation, not emotion, provides guidance to bench, bar, and public about what the law requires. Or, in Yale Law School Dean Anthony Kronman's graceful observation, itself illustrated by a story from Plato, stories themselves do not supply the means of choosing between stories or deciding which stories are more valuable than others.

Faced with this lukewarm response to the subject, what is the reader to make of the conference's project of applying the rhetoric of narrative to law? It seems only fair to see how this agenda plays out in the pieces contributed by the editors (and apparent organizers of the conference), Professors Gewirtz and Brooks. Presumably, they, at least, should know what they had in mind. The result demonstrates that Athens, indeed, has little to do with Jerusalem.

In his essay "Storytelling Without Fear? Confession in Law and Literature," Professor Brooks compares Supreme Court decisions governing the admissibility of a defendant's confession as evidence at trial—which focus on excluding statements tainted by government coercion—with the literary genre of confession represented, *inter alios*, by Rousseau, Camus, and the Marquis de Sade. Although it is difficult to see how the two halves of the essay bear on one another (the commentator, Elaine Scarry, a professor of English at Harvard, simply gave up on the literary discussion), my impression is that Professor Brooks finds in the confessional urge, both real and fictional, a form of compulsion that undermines the narrator's reliability in both life and art.

While this may be all well and good in theory, it rather misses the point that crimes occur, defendants confess, and courts have cases to decide. Although each step that

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Brooks takes is logical enough, as Professor Scarry remarks, he arrives at a point where the accused—often the only remaining eyewitness—is inherently incompetent to advise us of the accuracy of the charges against him. Now, this is especially cruel because in our criminal justice system, confession before trial moderates the defendant's punishment. In Professor Brooks' legal order, the defendant would not be able to confess but would be able to testify at trial and perjure himself, a gesture that ordinarily enhances the defendant's sentence.

But, after all, despite his reading of cases, Professor Brooks teaches literature, not law. What about Professor Gewirtz, who is a law professor trying his hand at literature? His effort, a particularly woolly piece entitled "Victims and Voyeurs: Two Narrative Problems at the Criminal Trial," shows literature departments to great advantage.

Because story scholarship strives to speak for the silenced members of society, Professor Gewirtz gamely stakes out the most silent class of all: "The absence of the murder victim at trial can be a gaping absence, but it is still absence, and presence is almost always more vivid than absence. Thus murder victims have a certain comparative disadvantage in the competing narratives of a trial"—not to mention the absolute disadvantage of being dead. The specific issue at hand is the use of "victim impact statements," which give the victim (or his survivors) a direct voice in determining a defendant's sentence, in capital cases as well as others. The vehicle for Gewirtz's discussion, I might add, is a case already overruled by the Supreme Court, giving the piece a slightly beside-the-point quality.

On the substantive issue, Gewirtz appears unsure of his own position, as if he can't quite tell on which side of the fence to come down. On the one hand, he seems to believe in a "bounded" use of victim accounts so as to limit their emotional impact—which, one would have thought, was the point of the whole exercise in the first place. On the other hand, he piously worries that victim testimony may be bad for the victim since storytelling is "often a risky and anxious business." Left to the readers' own consideration is whether giving formal voice to the personal interests of the victim in sentencing erodes the public nature of justice and marks a return to private vengeance.

As to the public's role in trials (the "voyeurs" of the title), Gewirtz exhibits similar inconsistency parading as moderation. The ordinary public has an increasing fascination with criminal trials; this engagement is related to the "rise of the *Oprah*-style television talk show" where the audience is invited to judge deviant behavior based on the "the implicit credo of . . . 'I feel, therefore I may judge' "; "Oprah" has led the public to believe that it is entitled, as it watches Court TV and C-Span, to make independent assessments of the defendant's guilt and the justice system; which, in turn, has led to the "grotesque spectacles" of the Simpson trial and the general decline of representative government. Having excoriated this media-generated voyeurism, Professor Gewirtz ties it all up by announcing that one reason victim impact evidence has a place at trial is that the victim's story is "what the public connects with most." I'm still not sure how narrative fits in. *Res ipsa loquitur*.

All in all, this symposium is a rather tame version of the kind of story scholarship that has been infecting the legal academy of late; apologetically absent is a contribution (committed for publication elsewhere) by Professor Richard Delgado, who has generated—at last count—eleven "Rodrigo Chronicles" in which a student of color instructs a willing law professor in the ways of postmodern intellectual life. Even Professor MacKinnon's brief conclusion (with only a paragraph or so about pimps and rape, the only mention of sex in the book) is pallid compared to her usual stuff—although she does seem a bit out of temper with the conference participants for not getting the point. The significance of the book is not in

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what it is, but in what it is striving to ally itself with.

As practiced by law faculties, narrative or story scholarship appears in several guises. One attempts to use the methods of literary criticism to analyze legal institutions, treating the process of adjudication as a struggle between competing narratives for emotive ascendancy. Another, which often takes the form of autobiography, seeks by means of stories to voice the claims of outsiders (particularly of oppressed tenured law professors, an oxymoron if ever there was one). Whatever the form, story scholarship builds on the premise that reasoned communication between people who do not share the same life experiences is impossible and that "reality" is socially constructed and, therefore, utterly malleable. As a result, story scholarship denies the possibility of a shared public culture (something that is essential for democracy) at the same time that it demands affirmation from that very culture.

What explains the legal academy's headlong rush into the kind of postmodern theory whose results—to steal a phrase from Frank Kermode—have been, at best, "interestingly catastrophic" in the humanities? For academics in the humanities, the answer is clear. The law is a particularly ripe territory for exploitation: witness the recent defections to law faculties by Stanley Fish (Duke University) and Martha Nussbaum (University of Chicago). As Professor Brooks candidly confesses in his introduction, he is drawn to the study of law because it represents an "exceptional intersection of textuality and social power," leaving the reader to entertain the suspicion that the social power involved is that of the humanities professor, rather than any other oppressed group.

As to the attraction for legal academics, the answer is less clear. Being one, I am half tempted to say that law unmodified is dull and leave it at that. But, of course, the answer is more complicated. A first stab might indict the Critical Legal Studies movement, which asserted that all legal decisions are determined by social or political factors and, accordingly, claimed to have disproved the possibility of the rule of law. Espoused by a cadre of left-wing legal academics whose career trajectory parallelled that of other tenured radicals in academia, "CLS" eventually spawned such progeny as critical race studies and feminist legal studies. The influence of postmodernism is exacerbated by the fact that elite legal publications—the gateway to law-school tenure—are edited by students who have been exposed to the radical intellectual agenda since reaching college, if not before.

A survey of any legal periodical can reveal the results: articles entitled "An Absolutely, Positively True Story: Seven Reasons Why We Sing" (encouraging the use of song in legal pedagogy because song is a medium through which subordinated people defy "the voice of domination"), "Disaggregating Gender from Sex and Sexual Orientation: The Effeminate Man in the Law and Feminist Jurisprudence" or, if you prefer the interdisciplinary approach, a symposium on ancient law in which the lawyerly participants, mixing with genuine classicists, opine on such matters as Biblical interpretation unburdened by any knowledge of ancient languages. Where these excesses will lead is anyone's guess. But, if there is any solace to be gained, it may be in *Law's Stories*'s own softly voiced tale of resistance to narrative.

Pevsner's paradox

David Van Zanten Building Paris: Architectural Institutions and the Transformation of the French Capital, 1830–1870. Cambridge University Press, 360 pages, $65

reviewed by J. Duncan Berry

The architectural "return of historicism" that so infuriated Sir Nikolaus Pevsner in the mid-1960s coincided, not surprisingly, with an invigorated scholarly interest in nineteenth-century architecture, which he

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greeted quite enthusiastically. Pevsner's divided reaction to this apparently spontaneous interdisciplinary coincidence illuminates a fundamental contradiction that I find especially acute in the American variant of the postmodernist ethos. And I believe that the book under review, although a work of unquestionably serious scholarship, unintentionally illustrates this paradox.

In the United States, the event that more or less catapulted postmodernist architectural history to broad public attention was the 1976 exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art of an enormous selection of nineteenth-century student projects from the Ecole des Beaux-Arts curated by the late Arthur Drexler. In addition to its mordant critique of contemporary modernist architecture and theory, the catalog contained a collection of revealing—and at times brilliant—essays by three young scholars: Neil Levine, Richard Chafee, and David Van Zanten. At the time, Van Zanten was the only scholar who had completed his dissertation and thus served, according to one of them, as the vital force binding the academic to the museological enterprise. Given the exhibition's adamantly polemical tone, it is noteworthy that his essay shunned the dispute. The same is also true of Chafee's fastidiously factual, and stunningly informative, contribution. Levine's essay, by contrast, while teeming with flashing insights and dazzlingly synthetic detective work, explicitly offered refined intellectual ammunition to the postmodern movement. This brilliant performance, along with a very small handful of shorter essays, was apparently sufficient to enable him to secure tenure at Harvard University; it was also sufficient to whip up a foaming tide of envy among colleagues who felt that Levine's canniness compromised the integrity of his (and their) status as "disinterested" scholars. In effect, the exhibition became something of a cause célèbre despite the scrupulous high-mindedness of Chafee and Van Zanten.

I must confess that Levine's writings impress me much in the same manner as Heinrich Wölfflin's: initially ravished by the sheer attractiveness of the author's rhetorical brilliance and compelling visuals, I retreat to a position of reflexive apprehension. For this reason, I have always found Van Zanten's comparatively wooden prose and methodical thoroughness more assuring, more comforting, more *reliable*. Although Levine subsequently turned his attention to Frank Lloyd Wright, [1] Van Zanten maintained his interest in French architecture and continued to publish prolifically—in marked contrast to Levine. But compared to Van Zanten's award-winning *Designing Paris: The Architecture of Duban, Labrouste, Duc and Vaudoyer* of 1987, his *Building Paris* is something of a disappointment.

In *Building Paris*, Van Zanten, now Professor of Art History at Northwestern University, has set out to address "the institutional control of the monumental form of Paris" by examining the role played by the government's architectural "services." Ensconced for months at a time in state archives, Van Zanten has taken nearly a decade to compose this fine-grained picture of the legal footing, institutional trajectory, and built consequences of agencies such as the Bâtiments Civils, the Travaux d'Architectures de la Ville de Paris, the Edifices Diocésains, and the Commission des Monuments Historiques. Van Zanten partially strips these purely bureaucratic entities of their anonymity by tracing the careers of four men (Fontaine, Baltard, Viollet-le-Duc, and Garnier) whose service as government architects decisively altered the built fabric of the capital. In so doing, Van Zanten has made an important contribution to our understanding of how Paris acquired its distinctively rhythmic massing and unique spatial cadences. The text is liberally laced with choice passages from contemporary fiction (primarily Zola) that buttress his account of the interplay between Paris-as-constructed and Paris-as-experienced.

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1 See *The Architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright*, by Neil Levine (Princeton University Press, 524 pages, $85).

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In contrast to *Designing Paris*'s emphasis on design principles, *Building Paris* treats "design principles as professional strategies and, as such, things much more complex, shifting, and elaborately negotiated." But the institutional crystals tumbling in the academic kaleidoscope that Van Zanten finds so endlessly fascinating, unfortunately, display only a few basic patterns. Despite his repeated declarations that his subject is "infinitely complex and fluid," the metropolis's inimitably soothing uniformity was only achieved through a cascading series of trade-offs between a bureaucratic vision of an appropriate urban template and matters of evolving taste and artistic license, with both sides of the equation worthy of sustained attention. But the desire to attend to the history of the profession—excuse me, professional *strategies*—as evidenced in the archival records, befits an age when an entire generation pursues careers as works of art. In this sense, *Building Paris* is the reductio ad absurdum of the thrall of state-sponsored professional specialization.

The book does contain a multitude of solid contributions to the systematic understanding of Parisian urbanism that have somehow escaped earlier writers. His revisionist discussion of the 1830 Romantics alone represents an important contribution to our understanding of Beaux-Arts architectural politics. Van Zanten also draws the useful if blunt distinction between "foreground" and "background" architectural tasks, with foreground buildings "representing" governmental authority and the background comprised of everything else: institutional tasks, like hospitals and prisons, and private sector commissions. I would have preferred treating institutional projects as a "middle ground"; this might have disencumbered the background concept from competing and often conflicting design activities. Finally, Van Zanten's discussion of the fundamentally ceremonial, scenographic nature of Parisian urbanism—in which sites are treated as tableaux made up of "shaped, telescoping spaces"—is outstanding. His novel treatment of these topics, and the causes for the paradoxical interplay of interior splendor and exterior restraint, significantly improves our understanding of European urbanism as a whole.

According to Van Zanten, private commissions, while offering the potential of considerably higher financial gain, could not compete with the prestige and incentives offered by government service—and by the same token, without an official apparatus recording the distribution of prizes, assignments, and official necrologies, private architectural practice offers the archival researcher very little to track. Of course, this methodological predisposition leads to some rather strained conclusions, including his declaration that "propelled by the economic boom of the Second Empire . . . the increasing numbers of [architectural functionaries] effectively became its designers much more than the architects of the individual background buildings." Statistically, one suspects that Van Zanten's preference for tackling large state commissions, while more manageable from a researcher's point of view, leaves the vast bulk of Parisian building activity almost wholly untouched, or touched by similar generalizations. Here, title betrays content.

This is the nub of the paradox mentioned above: Van Zanten is uneasy with his own attraction to the mechanisms of what he calls the "architecture of authority." One indication is his clarity about the aesthetic merits of capitalism: sneers for the prospects offered by the "consumerist fantasyland" in the quartier de l'Opéra, disgust for the "fantasy world of interior space devoted to ritual consumption," and contempt for "that peculiar bourgeois play of morality amid splendor." In contrast, he lauds the products of the state architectural apparatus as an architecture of "compromise" and "diplomacy." These positions reveal an unresolved ideological conflict regarding the nature of freedom and constraint. Indeed, it is the dynamic and inevitable tension between individual creativity and cultural convention that makes

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the study of architecture perpetually fascinating to so many non-architects. But when one's desires interfere with one's judgment, substantive problems multiply. That explains why episodes of design exchanges such as that between Félix Duban (an agent of the regime) and Charles Garnier (architect of the now *ancien* Opéra) are more instructive than Van Zanten can imagine; indeed, a series of case studies of such exchanges would have yielded a far more engaging account.

Van Zanten, of course, is very much in synch with the increasingly popular (and vulgar) theory-saturated brand of art-historical scholarship now proffered virtually everywhere. In *Building Paris*, this kind of thinking results in some relatively silly errors, like confusing Horeau's and Jourdain's realism for utopianism or the belief that empathy-based theories have a French origin; it also results in some equally silly but persistent and annoying verbal tricks, such as Van Zanten's habit of seeing "inflections" everywhere. But at its worst, as Hayek teaches, naïve statism inevitably leads in the opposite direction of its avowed intentions. In Van Zanten's case, it allows him to adopt a promiscuously anti-architectural, anti-individualist trope as his methodological rallying point: the notion of leveling. He assures us that the "conventional history [of nineteenth-century French architecture] focuses on personalities" and declares his intention to "flatten out the topography of the historical personalities and position them in the institutional structure so the original center points might be seen." Van Zanten also characterizes his enterprise as "level[ing] the received topography of nineteenth-century French architecture flat again [*sic*]." It is as if the design and experience of architecture are not, in their most essential sense, profoundly individual events—what I would call truly "original center points." In both cases, it is assumed that we already know the cast of characters; I would venture to guess that in reality most people are far more familiar with the monuments than with the architects. There is some hope, however, for Van Zanten states that:

> the greatest objection one might make to this narrative is the slight coverage we could offer of private construction's role. This is a weakness widespread in contemporary building history and practice, the misapprehension that one can understand and command architecture by controlling government authority, when the real challenge seems to be to learn to ride the unbroken horses of corporate business and real estate development.

Suggesting that this objection may "frame the volume that should follow," he renders *Building Paris* an excruciatingly difficult and perhaps unnecessary bridge between research projects.

As it stands now, though, Van Zanten's research program reveals a profound displacement of the locus of creativity from individuals to institutions, and it is likely that a scholar who feels that "one of the great attractions of the architecture of authority is its disconnection from everyday life, which leaves room for the most elaborate and outrageous colonizations" is constitutionally incapable of discerning value in private affairs. In his world, individuals become worthy of attention only when they shed light on the larger, aggregate, and impersonal forces of professional herds. And this dilemma has always struck me as a contradiction in the heart of "official" postmodernism: while public institutions could foster the humane virtues of a classical training, they could not digest genius. Thus, when a scholar like Van Zanten delves into this material, he is sympathetic with the aesthetic products of the institution but ultimately feels hamstrung by the Foucauldian censure against the policelike functioning of any such organization as an unqualified threat to creative freedom. On the other side of the coin, when Neil Levine finds a bona fide genius like Henri Labrouste, the enemy's script—in this instance, the high modernist penchant for

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romanticizing artistic heroes who defy the boobs and the bureaucrats—is appropriated and rewritten with new names and different aesthetic objectives. Of Wright, Levine's newest hero, we read in the conclusion to his recently published monograph that "we have good reason to regard him as the Other of this century—not the antimodern traditionalist . . . but the modernist's double and complement." For both Levine and now Van Zanten, political motives are denied even while a political agenda is advanced and it is either wishful thinking, childish obstinacy, or plain stupidity that keeps one blind to this reality.

Whether based in overweening collectivism or impious hagiography, theory-enriched architectural history has fallen prey to the same ideologically driven desire to force and polarize the facts that caused the revolt against modernism in the first place. I suspect that even the late Sir Nikolaus, no enemy of the collectivist mentality himself, would be rather concerned about this state of affairs.

The terrible teens

Grace Palladino
Teenagers: An American History.
Basic Books, 313 pages, $25

reviewed by Diana West

Just as the Left tried to promote the Cold War as a contest between two morally matched contenders, it has now turned its energies inward, bringing the same handicapping techniques to the culture wars in order to level the field. And so, *The Federalist Papers* equals the Seneca Falls Declaration equals Ancient Greece equals Tolmec culture. . . . The rolls are, by now, as familiar as they are endless. In *Teenagers: An American History*, Grace Palladino trots out a brand-new model of equivalence thinking, where gulag Communism and Western capitalism, Chaucer, and Toni Morrison, customarily hang in the balance, Palladino—coeditor of the Samuel Gompers Papers at the University of Maryland—now weighs successive generations of American teenagers and, miracle of miracles, finds them fighting the same battle.

According to *Teenagers*, the essence of teen life hasn't changed; rather, the changes in adolescent behavior over the past half-century have occurred because of ever-increasing "alternatives and opportunities." "In a sense," Palladino writes, "teenagers in the 1970s had won the battle for freedom that high-school students had been waging since the 1930s."

This "battle for freedom" is the dubious subject of *Teenagers*, a continuous struggle waged across the decades by teen soldiers—who, apparently, never die, they just turn twenty. Nameless "critics" serve up such notions as "cultural decline" and "permissive parents" to explain the social disintegration that the book documents almost in spite of itself; but these occasional lumps of criticism go unassimilated by the author. And if, logically, Palladino's theory of generational equivalence would at least seem to promise to puncture that self-haloed demographic bulge known as the Baby Boom, it doesn't happen. In other words, no silver lining. Just the generations, pre-World War II and post-World War II, cast in the same cloudy light.

The purpose? To deny the lessons of the past. "The order and discipline we usually associate with the good old days," writes Palladino, "had more to do with a lack of opportunities and alternatives than it did with a shared culture of 'traditional' family values or teenage respect for adult authority." If Palladino dismisses the importance of such virtues of the more civil society of yore, it follows that she will dismiss them as remedies for today's societal ills—which is exactly what she tries to do.

The way Palladino tells it, teenagers in the 1930s "battled their parents over curfews, cigarettes, and swing music; half a century [*sic*] later, the issues were sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll." Apples or oranges, anyone?

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Certainly, "sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll" are fightin' words, the familiar war whoop of the Sixties' cultural revolution. As slogans of intergenerational strife go, "curfews, cigarettes, and swing music," is somewhat less than rabble-rousing. Of course, whether Depression-era teens "battled" their parents en masse in the first place is one of the author's ultimately unconvincing propositions.

Take Palladino's comparison of rock 'n' roll and swing music. Sensing a difference between the two cultural markers that fall to either side of World War II, the author is unable to grasp its meaning. "Rock 'n' roll was a musical product specifically created with the teenage market in mind," she writes. No argument there. Palladino's excellent documentation of the market forces behind the rise of rhythm and blues, and, later, rock 'n' roll, amply demonstrates the power of the teenage purse in shaping the popular culture of an entire nation.

"Swing, on the other hand," she writes, "was a teenage discovery that set the market in motion." The analysis following this glib assertion creates the impression of an adult vacuum in both the appreciation and consumption of swing, which was, after all, one style (among others) that fit compatibly into the prevailing popular culture. Big bands included in their varied repertoires numbers from the likes of Jerome Kern, Richard Rodgers, and George Gershwin, to name a few of the celebrated and, not incidentally, sophisticated theatrical composers of the day.

Palladino, however, fusses about teen enthusiasm for jive talk and jitterbugging in an effort to depict swing as a cultural wedge, but notes, albeit in passing, that while they might have been considered "annoying, or even a waste of time . . . they were rarely viewed as dangerous or a threat." The fact is, swing did not tear the generations apart, young from old, as did rock 'n' roll a decade or so later. Palladino does mention that big-band audiences included "a generational mix that had insured a certain civility on stage"—keeping Benny Goodman from smashing his clarinet, thank goodness—but she fails to make sense of the implications: before World War II, pop culture played primarily to adults.

Instead, *Teenagers* makes much ado about a 1941 incident in which four girls in their early teens skipped out on a club trip to the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., in order to take in a new movie featuring the Glenn Miller Orchestra. On returning to the museum, they found their bus had left and were directed to police headquarters. "Astounding the officers with their energy, their attitude, and their jive-talking, finger-snapping ways, these girls seemed to be a strange new species of teenage life with a language and a rhythm all its own."

At least that's how Palladino tells it. If the striking richness of her characterization sends a reader back to the actual news account, he will find a noticeably different story. The girls were directed to police headquarters all right, where they indeed "jitterbugged up and down the corridors as [a clerk] wired their parents for busfare. Police heaved a sigh of relief when the $5 came and peace descended over the Municipal Building." End of story.

Palladino has to add that something extra—the "attitude," the "new species of teenage life," etc.—to pad her theory. She persists in seeing "Goodman's bobbysoxers and the Beatles' fans [as] part of the same cultural trend," even as she senses that the unusual animosity between these generations indicates that something more than thirty years separates them. Could it not be that they differed on some fundamental level?

In light of *Teenagers*'s obsession with teens and swing, it's worth mentioning that the movie in question, a bit of fluff called *Sun Valley Serenade*, portrays the Miller band performing *In the Mood*, an archetypal swing number, for a black-tie, adult crowd. And while the movie won't make anyone's top-ten list, it is by no means a "teen" movie: the imagery, the style, the context,

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all relate to an adult world. Following the war, that world began to disappear. Why? As far as it goes, *Teenagers* is quite illuminating on this count. The term "teenager," Palladino tells us, didn't even come into usage until 1941. Before 1930, most teenagers worked to assist the family; adolescence was a luxury of the upper classes. Indeed, the concept of teen life as a distinct stage developed only as families grew affluent enough to allow their teenagers to become consumers, namely in the period of expansion following World War II. Then, as one promoter vividly pointed out, "parents were willing and able to 'play Santa Claus 365 days a year.' "

Teenagers introduces a little-known grandmother named Helen Valentine, who, in September, 1944, improbably rocked the world by launching *Seventeen* magazine. Convinced of the unexploited bounty of the youth market, Valentine persuaded retailers and manufacturers *for the first time* to target teens, particularly young girls. Success was instantaneous. Under Valentine, *Seventeen* may have "championed teenage desire for personal freedom . . . in the context of personal responsibility," but, by the 1950s, a younger generation of businessmen was ready to ditch the personal-responsibility baggage in order to concentrate on teenage desire. Eureka. Fixing the lens of the market on adolescence transformed the perception of the teen age, exaggerating its importance, but not its profitability. For proof, consider the emergence of rock 'n' roll, the ultimate expression of adolescent taste.

Teenagers describes the phenomenon in detail, from Chuck Berry to Elvis and on to the Beatles, including such kingmakers and pied pipers as Ed Sullivan and Cleveland disc jockey Alan Freed, men whose promotional efforts were catalysts to the rock explosion. More important, *Teenagers* documents the advent of a brand-new, heretofore unseen, emphasis on—indeed, domination of—the teen experience in mainstream popular culture. Never again would adolescence be seen as a way station to adulthood; instead it would become an end in and of itself, formative in a new and lasting way.

But where Palladino examines the record, she sees only the rise of the teenager; equally as important, however, is the death of the grown-up. One is not possible without the other. The fact is, as consumerism became the American pastime, and as consumption, particularly consumption of entertainment, became driven by the infantile yearnings of adolescents, the influence of the adult on taste and behavior rapidly diminished.

Even now—perhaps especially now—we feel the reverberations. In the context of *Teenagers*, one example is particularly striking. In 1947, the National Association of Broadcasters "agreed never to air shows or commercials that might undermine 'juvenile respect for parents, the home or moral conduct.' They also pledged never to air salacious material, a pledge NBC kept in 1949 when it refused to play the provocative song, 'Six Times a Week and Twice on Sundays.' "

How quaint. How moral. How, as we know, short-lived. Was the about-face simply a matter of talk being cheap and rock 'n' roll being lucrative? Interestingly enough, this and other cracks in the bulwarks were beginning to show long before the gathering wave of the Baby Boom crested. Contrary to popular wisdom, the demographic colossus that began to take shape after World War II actually had its trail blazed by youngsters born during the Depression; that is, the emphasis on teens actually began in the 1950s when their numbers were still relatively few. The Baby Boomers' coming-of-age, of course, made the shift to an adolescently skewed society irreversible.

"Adults who welcomed teenagers as adult consumers in the marketplace could not expect them to remain children at home or at school," writes Palladino. But they could try. Still fighting the good fight in 1965 was, amazingly enough, *Esquire* magazine, today one among a slew of glossies dedicated to the glorification of vapids and trendies. Pal-

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ladino cites a magazine editorial addressed to teens that cuts to the crux of the matter: "Remember that no matter how many millions of dollars are spent catering to your taste in music, your taste in music remains very bad: Even more millions are devoted to the study and treatment of your pimples, but that doesn't make pimples a good thing."

Awfully nice salvo, but by 1965, the war was over. The grown-up was dead, and a brave new age of infantilism was upon us. Since then, we have seen the rise of adolescents—and adolescently influenced adults—who have scarcely any links to their predecessors, cut adrift as they are from the moral strictures and social conventions of the past. The results—the teen epidemics of premarital sex and illegitimacy, suicide and violence, drug and alcohol abuse—are not pretty. Even Palladino notices that Baby Boom-born parents, who, after all, did so much to eviscerate those strictures and conventions, are having second thoughts, going so far as to yearn for a few binding rules and bourgeois expectations of their own. ("A onetime rebel posed the question on many boomers' minds: Is it hypocritical for a parent who engaged in premarital sex to advise her child not to?") Such wavering has Palladino worried. "No matter what kind of spin adults now put on the good old days, the 'rules' they now long for were rules of inequality and social conformity," she writes, trying to inoculate her readers against an attack of dread nostalgia. It doesn't work.

Shorter notices

Henry George Liddell & Robert Scott, compilers
A Greek-English Lexicon. Ninth Edition, with a Revised Supplement, 1996.
Oxford University Press, 2362 pages, $125

The thing itself, the grand old thing, is one hundred and fifty-three years old. Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott—both born in 1811 and both Firsts at Oxford in 1833—published the first edition of *A Greek-English Lexicon* in 1843, six years into the reign of Victoria. During Liddell's lifetime, it went through eight ever-expanding and improving editions. Liddell died in 1898 at the age of eighty-seven, co-creator of one of the glories of nineteenth-century practical scholarship. He and Scott rank with James Murray of the OED, with the compilers of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, and with Leslie Stephen, editor of the *Dictionary of National Biography*, as wonderfully synthesizing minds. Look, for instance, at the six columns that take *logos* from "the account of money handled" to "the Word or Wisdom of God." Liddell, like Stephen, has had his fame eclipsed by that of a daughter: Liddell's daughter was the Alice of Wonderland; Stephen's daughter was Virginia Woolf, resentful and scribbling. (The Henry/Alice/Carroll configuration might be an unwritten Henry James story.)

Sir Henry Stuart Jones then took up the never-finished work, but the snaillike pace of his labor (he seems to have been a bit of a Casaubon) meant that the ninth edition of the dictionary (commonly referred to as *LSJ*) in 1940 was posthumous; Sir Henry had died in 1939. There was a Supplement in 1968, and there has now come out a new, extensively revised and enlarged Supplement, amounting to three hundred and twenty large pages. It is printed both with *LSJ* and as a separate volume ($65).

What does the Supplement do? Three things, mainly. First, it adds new words and usages found on recently discovered (often late) papyri. Many of these are transliterations of Latin words; this was the Empire. A few have the charm of "*Blops*: onomatopoeic word expressing sound of drops falling into water."

Secondly, corrections of earlier imperfections or outright errors are made in the Supplement. When reading a good critical edition of a Greek text—say, W. S. Barrett's edition of Euripides' *Hippolytus* or K. J. Dover's edition of Aristophanes' *Clouds*—one notes their sometimes exasperated chidings of *LS* or *LSJ* and wonders if the

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rebukes are ever heeded. I checked a few: in the *Hippolytus* the cliffs where Hippolytus will crash are called *thalassei synnomoi*. *LSJ* had "that lie between two seas," which Barrett called "absurd." He translated, "That consort with the sea"; *LS* Rev. Sup. now reads "which consort with the sea." Barrett's correction of *syrinx* from "hole in the nave" to the wheel-nave itself is accepted, while his insistence that *antyx* means not the "bridge" of a lyre but the "whole framework" is ignored. In *The Clouds*, Dover read the moistness in *drosos* as referring to "Cowper's secretion" from the penis and noted, dryly, that "*LSJ* . . . curiously refers to the cheeks." *LS* Rev. Sup. has yielded to Dover. With sexual words generally, *LS* Rev. Sup. speaks more plainly than earlier editions. Thus, *binein*, the commonest word for "fuck," is defined as "coarse wd. for to have sexual intercourse." This is an improvement on *LSJ*'s pudent retreat behind Latin—they define the word as "*inire*, *coire*"; British schoolboys are no longer thought of, I guess, as in danger from Greek wordspotting. But it is still well short of what a grown-up lexicon should do. Apropos of dirty words, I see that a new dildo-compound—*olisbodokos*, receiving the dildo—has been restored in Sappho. You'd never know, though, from *LSJ* or *LS* Rev. Sup. exactly what an *olisbos* is, unless you could translate the Latin they decorously supply for young readers.

The odd lexical correction can be immensely important in, say, philosophy. *LS* Rev. Sup. tells us that, the only time it occurs in Plato's *Republic*, *theologia* means not "science of things divine" but "talk about gods."

Thirdly, *LS* Rev. Sup. includes "Mycenean"—that is, the early (c. 1200 B.C.) form of Greek found on the Linear B tablets. The problem is that Mycenean used a syllabic script with characters difficult to reproduce, while this is an alphabetically ordered lexicon. The solution adopted here is to spell out Mycenean signs in Roman transliteration and to place such words at the end of Greek entries representing later—and sometimes very different—forms of the same word. This is "to warn the user that the word occurred in the Linear B texts."

The result is bizarre and virtually useless. It doesn't work at all as a Mycenean-into-Greek or Mycenean-into-English lexicon. Say you've run across a Mycenean word that *could* be Romanized as *qa-si-re-u* and have no idea what it means. Good luck. There's no *qa* in later Greek. Check beta. It is under *basileus*, king! If you are looking up *oinos*, wine, you might or might not be interested to note that Myceneans drank *wo-no*. And they cooked with the oil of the *e-ra-wo*. And the palace bowmaker was called a *to-ko-so-wo-ko* (Mycenean for the hypothetical *toxourgos*). Of course no one actually spoke such gibberish, which sounds like the argot of Japanese torturers in a World War II film. The Mycenean syllabary was a very clumsy, primitive device for recording sounds, and it looks even clumsier in Roman attire. Until better orthographic conventions are arrived at, Mycenean should be kept in separate lexica, in its own syllabary, and not integrated into Greek-alphabet lexica.

And that brings me to a larger issue. This ought to be the last *LS* revised by piecemeal accretion—agglutinatively, as linguists say. The next time the job has to be done from the root. The present editors acknowledge the need, confessing that "many articles require a more drastic rewriting than can be achieved by the addition, exclusion, or alteration of individual items. Minor changes may in fact only highlight shortcomings in the original articles." Time and money and restricted staff and an inability to make "a systematic use" of "electronic retrieval facilities" prevented the necessary radical overhaul from being undertaken this time. In making this obvious point, I fear seeming ungrateful for what has here been so meticulously and nobly done. I feel like a *phrixopobrontaxastraptes*, "a hurler of frightful thunder and lightning," into an *elaionophoinikoparadeisos*, an "olive and date orchard." Both words are lexical newcomers.

—Donald Lyons

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John Ackerman
Dylan Thomas: His Life and Work.
St. Martin's Press, 201 pages,
$45; $17.95 paper

John Ackerman wants to dispel two pervasive myths about Dylan Thomas (1914–1953): that Thomas was the colorful drunk and rhapsodizing lyrist portrayed in works like J. M. Brinnin's memoir *Dylan Thomas in America*, and that Thomas, having dissipated the inspiration of his angelic youth, spent his last years as a sort of traveling clown, besotted by drink and poetically impotent. In place of these myths, Ackerman presents Thomas the working-class Welsh bard, relatively sober and productive to the end. "Now that Thomas is accepted as a great twentieth-century poet and prose writer, the tides of sensationalism and denigration largely ebbed away, we can trace his professional commitment both in films and broadcasting that contributed to his later development, in poetry and prose, and also the ordinariness of his life." Whether Thomas merits inclusion in the pantheon of twentieth-century greats remains open to question. What seems certain is that Ackerman's gormless attempt at a critical life will convince no one of the poet's greatness; it may, however, gain inclusion in the pantheon of truly bad books.

The life, in fact, receives scant treatment, whereas Ackerman labors like a mule over the poems—though I'm sure a mule could have done better. Here is the first stanza of "Especially when the October wind":

> Especially when the October wind
> With frosty fingers punishes my hair,
> Caught by the crabbing sun I walk on fire
> And cast a shadow crab upon the land,
> By the sea's side, hearing the noise of birds,
> Hearing the raven cough in winter sticks,
> My busy heart who shudders as she talks
> Sheds the syllabic blood and drains her words.

And the typically picayune comment by Ackerman: "The punishing by 'frosty fingers' is an original evocation of the feeling of the wind blowing through the hair. The sun is referred to as 'crabbing' since it casts a crab-like shadow of the body (as suggested in the later image, 'shadow crab')." In the heat of exegesis, he forgets the first line, getting the season wrong: "for the time of the poem is early winter." Thomas's alliterative and assonantal excesses stem, we are told, from the Welsh tradition of *cynghanedd*, meaning "harmony, and in poetry is a means of giving pattern to a line by the echoing of sounds, consonantal and vowel." A satisfactory explanation, but no excuse. Of course, the poet knew no Welsh.

Ackerman, as noted, occasionally aims his penetrating insight at Thomas's now legendary life. Of his childhood we learn that his mother thought him "a very sensitive boy," that he was in Ackerman's words "a highly-imaginative, sensitive child" possessing a "hypersensitive nature." When not repeating himself, Ackerman contradicts himself. For instance, Thomas's "intense nature, enjoying all the pleasures of life, was alien to [Welsh Puritanism's] repressive doctrines"; so it comes as a surprise to find that, ten pages later, "He was a Puritan." In another reversal, Ackerman takes Thomas at his word when he compared himself to Arthur Rimbaud: "This 'reasoned derangement of all the senses' is, as we have seen, a characteristic of Thomas's poetry: indeed he once referred to himself as 'the Rimbaud of Cwmdonkin Drive.'" As long as it's convenient, Ackerman doesn't mind the myth of the debauched poet.

While living, Thomas received much acclaim for his best work: Randall Jarrell thought him "more original" than Hart Crane. His posthumous reputation has foundered on the rocks of dissent. Such poems as "Before I knocked," "The force that through the green fuse drives the flower," "Fern Hill," "Poem in October," and two or three others are, in my opinion, still rightly esteemed for their mellifluousness, their prosodic virtuosity, and the lyrical lushness (some would say decadence) of their language. With the villanelle "Do not go gentle into that good night," the poet

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achieved his least disputed instance of greatness. Aside from these, Thomas wrote some euphonious poems, a lot of romantic doggerel and stultifying songs, a few volumes of humorous stories (*Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog* and *Adventures in the Skin Trade*), reminiscences of childhood (virtually his entire oeuvre could be placed under this rubric), and a handful of screenplays and radio broadcasts notable mainly for their mawkishness and constricted subject matter. Thomas never got over the quaintness of his childhood.

Ackerman's insipid commentary gives no sense of Thomas's limits as a poet and offers a deranged assessment of his successes. He conspicuously fails to discuss "Do not go gentle" and flubs the rhyme scheme of "Over Sir John's Hill." Reading "Fern Hill," he makes much of that poem's syllabic structure, actually counting all its syllables for us, but he never analyzes the accentual pattern of the poem—evincing a thorough ignorance of prosody. Thomas's radio play *Under Milk Wood*, which Ackerman purports to admire, is summed up in a series of negations: "There is no plot, no action, no development of incident. . . . The characters remain basically the same—they come to no deeper knowledge of themselves than they possessed at the outset." Obviously, this is a description designed to make us rush out and read the play.

Relying heavily and uncritically on secondary sources, Ackerman does happen upon something useful. He cites Matthew Arnold, who, in an essay on Welsh literature, adumbrates Thomas's fundamental weakness as a poet:

> The true art, the *architectonicé* which shapes great works . . . comes only after a steady, deep-searching survey, a firm conception of the facts of human life, which the Celt has not patience for. So he runs off into technic, where he employs the utmost elaboration, and attains astonishing skill; but in the contents of his poetry you have only so much interpretation of the world as the first dash of a quick, strong perception, and then sentiment, infinite sentiment, can bring you.

Replete with unsupported assertions, clumsy argumentation, and a feckless inattention to detail, Ackerman's book manages to do little more than explode the myth of his own competence.

—*Daniel Kunitz*

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Notebook

George Mackay Brown, 1921–1996

by Robert Richman

George Mackay Brown's death this year, at the age of seventy-four, is a terrible blow: he was Scotland's finest poet, and one of the finest in all Britain. In a *New York Times* obituary, the Irish poet Seamus Heaney said that he had never seen Brown's poetry sufficiently praised. I would concur, and add that Brown's work had never been sufficiently published, either, at least not in the United States, where only some of Brown's fiction and children's books have appeared. When I think of the lack of regard accorded Brown's poetry on this side of the Atlantic, it is hard not to think of his predecessor and mentor Edwin Muir, another Scotsman whose work is unknown to many American readers.

Brown, like Muir, was from Orkney, the remote group of islands north of the Highland region; the two met while the younger poet was a student at Newbattle Abbey, the college where Muir was warden. Some years later, Muir wrote an introduction to Brown's first book, *The Storm and Other Poems* (1954). In *The Wreck of the Archangel* (1989), Brown's penultimate volume of poems, there are four poems to Muir written on the one-hundredth anniversary of his birth. Even without knowledge of these poems or of Brown's tutelage under Muir, the lineage between him and the older poet is obvious. Both poets wrote poems of breathtaking simplicity. Both poets wrote poems that—despite the simple surface—sacrifice nothing of reality's complexity. And both turned to verse late in life: Muir didn't start writing poetry until he was thirty-five. Brown's first book appeared when he was thirty-three.

And yet, for all their apparent likenesses, there are some telling differences. Brown is utterly immersed in Orkney, its past and present. As often as Muir mentions his homeland in his verse, and despite his having written a prose volume entitled *The Scots and their Country* (1946), he wasn't as focused on Orkney as Brown. With his abstract meditations on time and tributes to European literary heroes like Kafka and Hölderlin, Muir is much more the modernist; his roads, fields, and farmhouses seem timeless and placeless. And when Muir delves into myth, Hector, Prometheus, Tristram, and Orpheus are the figures he discusses, while Brown is more likely to write about figures from Norse or Orkney mythology.

Few British or American poets celebrate a specific locale better than Brown celebrates Orkney; its forceful physical presence is everywhere evident in the poems. "In an island, no one escapes the sea," he writes in "A Winter Tale," a poem from *The Wreck of the Archangel*. "Spume and gull everywhere./ The sea beats at the end of every road." And in "One Star in the West," from *Following a Lark*, the last book before his death, Brown describes the scene after a storm:

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But all cleared, larks were singing
Again, the April rain ringing
Across the sown hills,
Among the daffodils.

The stones of Orkney figure prominently in Brown's poetry. For the islands' inhabitants, these stones have a practical purpose: building material for houses. But in a wind-swept, treeless land like Orkney, they also serve as surrogate flowers. In "Flower of the Stone," from the sequence "Stone," in *The Wreck of the Archangel*, Brown writes:

Flower of the stone,
Fire on a hearth.

Flower of the stone,
A jar of honey.

Flower of the stone,
A jar of oats.

Flower of the stone,
Fulmar, unfurling.

Place names also populate Brown's verse; he relishes them almost as much as the sea and land. Hamnavoe, Brown's fictional name for his home town of Stromness, turns up many times, along with such real names as Papay, Barra, Culloden, Gairsay, Stronsay, and Cormack.

Excellent though Brown's praise is for the geographical reality of Orkney and for the names of various areas, however, he saves his highest praise for the people: the ferrymen, blacksmiths, "skalds," priests, drunks, gravediggers, and barmen. In "Foldings," from *Fishermen with Ploughs* (1971), Brown compares one activity common to the four groups of Orcadians discussed in the poem:

What they fold, what the shepherds fold,
Is this, in March
A mothering huddle.

The crofter's trade a hoarding, folding,
burnishing
Of seed from snow.

What the fishermen fold is this,
A sklinter of haddocks
From the breached Atlantic banks.

What the women fold
Are torn nets, a stretch of yarn from the loom,
Sheaf after sheaf of August oats,
In the cupboard cheese and honey and ale
and bread . . .

Sometimes invented Orcadians narrate the poems. In "Beachcomber," from *Fishermen with Ploughs*, an elder-fearing youth provides a report of a week's booty from one shore:

Monday I found a boot—
Rust and salt leather.
I gave it back to the sea, to dance in.

Tuesday a spar of timber worth thirty bob.
Next winter
It will be a chair, a coffin, a bed.

Wednesday a half can of Swedish spirits.
I tilted my head.
The shore was cold with mermaids
and angels.

Thursday I got nothing, seaweed,
A whale bone,
Wet feet and a loud cough.

Friday I held a seaman's skull,
Sand spilling from it
The way time is told on kirkyard stones.

Saturday a barrel of sodden oranges.
A Spanish ship
Was wrecked last month at The Kame.

Sunday, for fear of my elders,
I sit on my bum.
What's heaven? A sea chest with a thousand
gold coins.

Beachcombing is a common practice in these islands because, as Brown writes in the introduction to *The Wreck of the Archangel*, Orkney "lay athwart a great sea-way

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from Viking times onwards, and its . . . shores are strewn with wrack, jetsam, occasional treasure."

In "Fisherman's Bride," also from *Fishermen with Ploughs*, the poem is spoken by the titular newlywed:

> Around us a muted din
> Of fiddles and feet,
> Circlings of bread and ale.
>
> This room we are in
> At the seaward side, is still.
> I turn a cold sheet.
>
> Midnight. The shoal drifts
> Like a host of souls unborn, along
> the shore.
> The tide sets from the west.
>
> His salt hand shifts
> From tumults of thigh and breast
> To the hard curve of an oar.

Brown's stories, too, more often than not are narrated by invented speakers. Not that Brown avoids real people. *Following a Lark* has tributes to the Orkney poet Robert Rendell and to Attie Campbell. The latter begins: "Where do you wander now, my friend?/ Where do you drink?/ Few inns better than Hamnavoe bar,/ Few better stories, I think." "William and Mareon Clark," from *Voyages* (1983), follows the fortunes of a real married couple, two tavernkeepers, of the late sixteenth century. The fourth section begins:

> Four hundred years since you both
> Went, sundered, into the dark,
> Hearts and heathstone cold,
> William and Mareon Clark.
>
> Search for a stone in the kirkyard—
> Nothing. Never a mark.
> No-one know where your bones lie,
> William and Mareon Clark.
>
> Even the inn you built
> To hustle about the work
> Of welcome and keeping is vanished,
> William and Mareon Clark.

The poem proceeds for thirteen more delightful stanzas, all ending with the line "William and Mareon Clark"—except for the last, which closes on an even more emphatic note: WILLIAM and MAREON CLARK.

Brown is a master of this kind of repetition. Whether entire lines are repeated, as in "William and Mareon Clark" and "Flower of the Stone," or actions recur in a given span of time, as in "Beachcomber," or certain words appear—*haddock* and *seal* and *sheep* turn up almost as much as *stone*—Brown's repetitions would appear to be more proof of his undying devotion to Orcadian reality. He doesn't want to turn away from any slice of this visible world before it has exhausted its myriad riches. In the words of the dream-recounting narrator of "The Road to Emmaus," from *Winter Tales*:

> What I dreamed was this voice, saying words; there was nothing but a voice, and it went in a kind of slow song, like the church bells I used to hear when I was a kid, far off. The song was only a whisper to begin with, in darkness, and all it did was things, like "star" and "sea" and ordinary things like that, and it was like I was getting to know the things for the first time, and I was delighted with them, for some reason, in the dream.

Numbers and references to mathematics also crop up repeatedly in Brown's work: "Seven women of different/ ages stood about his bed" ("The Jars"); "Dawn opened, a rose/ Upon three travellers asleep" ("Desert Sleepers"); "The hundred and fifty children/ Woke up in scattered beds" ("The Island of the Children"). In "Five Green Waves," a story from *A Time to Keep*, a child is punished for not learning the Pythagorean theorem. And in "Country Girl," from *The Year of the Whale*, the seven circles the lover makes for his mate are broken in the course of the poem:

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I make seven circles, my love,
For your good breaking.
I make the gray circle of bread
And the circle of ale
And I drive the butter round in a golden ring
And I dance when you fiddle
And I turn my face with the turning sun till your feet come in from the field.
My lamp throws a circle of light,
Then you lie for an hour in the hot unbroken circle of my arms.

It might seem that something as abstract as mathematics would go against the grain of a more or less reality-grounded poet like Brown. And yet, in these poems numbers coexist very well with the representations of the palpable world. The reason for this is that digits and numerals are never presented out of the Orcadian context. Mathematics is strained through what Brown calls the "lucid prism" of Orkney. Brown's numbers, to borrow another image, dance to the fiddling of Orkney, the same way the speaker in "Country Girl" dances to the song of the fiddler.

There is a dark side to Orkney that occasionally shadows this poetry—destructive alcoholics, scandal-mongers, lechers. But Brown for the most part leaves these matters to his fiction. And, despite the defence of country values in the poems, Brown never stoops to anti-city harangues. Nor does he pontificate about Orkney's widespread poverty. In this, Brown emulates his mentor, Muir, who knew poverty firsthand but refused to make his poetry into a sounding-board on the subject. How unlike both poets are in this regard to their Scottish compatriot Hugh MacDiarmid, a Communist who regularly spouted party doctrine and left-wing sentiment in his poems.

"The tongues flow yet/ To rhythms of sea and hill," Brown writes in "To a Hamnavoe Poet of 2093," from *Following a Lark*. To follow in poetry the rhythms of sea and hill is Brown's more modest occupation. Along, of course, with following the "inconsequential" activities of the Orcadian people. "To enter, by imagination and art, the lives of those uncelebrated folk, has given me constant delight." Reading him, we learn much about Orcadians, but even more about humanity.

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Letters

Letter from London

To the Editors:
I read *The New Criterion* with interest, more often than not agreeing with what I read. But as I imbibed Roger Kimball's agreeable invective against "accelerating cultural decadence" ("Letter from London," June 1996), for instance, I was also struck by the presence of a disagreeable contradiction. The culture is disparaged but the political economy spawning it is ignored or praised.

Democracy *is* pop culture; capitalism *is* "business as usual" (Mr. Kimball's words)—in the products of contemporary culture as elsewhere. The "assault on culture" is the acid wash of the rule of what sells. The popular will inevitably call into question what is less than popular. This regime is one where Kodak will be more prevalent than Kandinsky, always. Why is Mr. Kimball surprised? How can it be any other way? On what democratic/capitalist grounds can he expect anything else?

Conservatives have this problem: they feel they must like capitalism in theory even though they find most of its products not to their taste in practice. They naturally have divided souls.

So, Mr. Kimball is led to condemn "those who combine with equal ferocity a passion for consumerism with a taste for the meretricious." What is it but democratic capitalism which encourages such passions and cultivates such taste? Mr. Kimball's appalling combination doesn't occur in a vacuum.

The problem with democracy and the promiscuity of capitalism are perhaps why conservatives are tempted by fascism. Their objection to the degraded and degrading culture seeks a stern political cure. But it is a cure which can't name its real enemy, the indifference to worth inherent in the ethos of "business as usual" and the unforgiving priority the economy puts on what excites a sale, makes a profit. These latter become the standards of the culture no less than the standards of the political economy. To rule them out, a different sort of politics is often embraced, one which needs to punish the cultural culprits because it can't punish the capitalists. Such culprits are always to be found.

William E. Johnston, Jr.
Point Richmond, Cal.

Roger Kimball replies:
The "disagreeable contradiction" that Mr. Johnston laments results primarily from his belief that "democracy *is* pop culture." But it is precisely that equation which is at issue: does democracy entail or encourage cultural degradation? Only those who have despaired of democracy will entertain Mr. Johnston's certainty on this question. To be sure, many thinkers whom we would now call reactionary—from Plato to Nietzsche on down to our own day—would have agreed with the sentiment expressed by Mr. Johnston's equation. Typical is Nietzsche's sneering reference to "Shopkeepers, Christians, cows, females, Englishmen, and other democrats."

Yet there is another view of democracy, one endorsed by Pericles and, not incidentally, by the

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Founding Fathers. On this view, democracy is not the enemy of excellence, but its most reliable political precondition. Of course, democracy, like all human inventions, can be perverted. And, on the principle that *corruptio optimi pessima*, one may even expect that the perversion of democracy, like the perversion of all great virtues, leads to the most obnoxious deformations.

It is hardly news that we are today living with the regrettable results of such perversion; nor is it surprising that, as Mr. Johnston suggests, the disintegration of culture should spark various extreme reactions. The essential point to bear in mind, however, is that democracy is not the same thing as egalitarianism. One can very well be a democrat in one's political sympathies and —dare one say it?—an elitist in matters of human achievement, including cultural achievement. Mr. Johnston makes a kind of category mistake: he confuses the notion of equality before the law—which is indeed a bedrock of democracy—with the ideology of sameness, i.e., egalitarianism.

Something similar may be said about Mr. Johnston's understanding of capitalism. Whatever else it is, capitalism is far and away the most productive engine for creating wealth that the world has ever seen. We are all of us lucky to live in a regime committed to capitalist principles. To say that there have been—and continue to be—abuses in capitalist societies, to say that other values are sometimes compromised for the sake of monetary gain, is simply to say that we have not yet contrived to create utopia—yet another thing we must all be grateful for.

Frost's rehabilitation

To the Editors:

James Tuttleton, quite literally, doesn't know what he's talking about in his review of my life of Robert Frost (June 1996) and his gratuitous crack that I "overstress" (in two pages out of four hundred) Edmund Wilson's "sex-obsessed foot fetishism" is fully contradicted by Hilton Kramer's appreciative review of my Wilson biography in last year's *New Criterion* (May 1995).

Mr. Tuttleton first mentions that "there is not a great deal of documentation in support of Meyers's remarkable claim that the poet, then in his mid-sixties, commenced a secret love affair that extended into his seventies and eighties!" My documentation, clearly stated in the notes, was nothing less than a two-thousand-page unpublished typescript by Lawrance Thompson and a six-hour interview with Kay Morrison's daughter. The skeptical Tuttleton may not be capable of such a passionate liaison, but Frost certainly was. Mr. Tuttleton disparagingly claims that this secret and hitherto unknown love affair, which had a powerful influence on Frost's love poetry, "adds very little to previous biographies of Frost."

He also calls my treatment of the poetry "perfunctory" and "reductive," though I show for the first time the important impact of Thomas Hardy and offer new readings of a dozen major poems.

In the last three years, I have published biographies of Fitzgerald, Wilson, and Frost. Mr. Tuttleton, who has published no books during that time, has attacked all three of them. His malignant and astonishingly ill-informed criticism will soon be forgotten. The books remain.

Jeffrey Meyers

James W. Tuttleton replies:

Once each year, about the same time, a Jeffrey Meyers biography blows in like the annual Indian monsoon, full of a lot of wind and wet, but lacking any critical depth or human understanding. I have said all that could be said for these books, but only a biographer panting for unconditional praise could call my reviews malignant. I harbor no malice for Mr. Meyers, whom I have never met.

In any case, I hardly think it is malicious to say, among other things, that Meyers is obsessed with the sex life of his subjects. He can't even write a letter to an editor without dragging *my* sex life into the discussion: "The skeptical Tuttleton may not be capable of such a passionate liaison" as Frost, etc. About my private life, of course, he knows not a thing. But he is not above ignorantly generalizing about my sex life —and that of biographical subjects like Frost. Such prurience is a vulgar sign of the times and makes for doubtful biography.

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I may be wrong in judgment, often or infrequently, but at least I try to get facts right. Meyers says that Tuttleton has "published no books" during the last three years, while he has published *three*. I can't resist saying that a reader interested in *the facts* will find in the card catalogue that in 1993 my *Washington Irving: The Critical Reaction* (AMS Press) appeared, and in 1996 I published *Vital Signs: Essays on American Literature and Criticism* (Ivan R. Dee). Mr. Meyers's transparent effort to put me down as a nonpublisher represents the kind of careless criticism and shoddy scholarship that I have consistently remarked in his biographies. Always, though, in books, it is quality and not quantity that counts.

French "collabo" writers

To the Editors:
The interesting piece by Jim Tuck on French "collabo" writers (June 1996) contains an unfortunate mistake concerning Paul Claudel.

Claudel's "effusive ode to Marshal Pétain" (actually entitled "Paroles au Maréchal") was not composed in 1942 but in December 1940 on the occasion of a performance of his play *L'Annonce faite à Marie* in Vichy. When he later published it, he described it as "a monument to Naivety and Imposture." He also admitted that it had been written in the wake of Pétain's dismissal of Pierre Laval, a gesture that many people interpreted at the time as a disassociation from collaboration. In fact, Claudel, who otherwise would have been naturally sympathetic to some aspects of the Vichy ideology, came to realize its real nature much sooner than others (the late President Mitterrand for one) as a result of his involvement in the "affaire Paul-Louis Weiller." P.-L. Weiller was a close friend of Claudel, as well as his colleague on the board of Gnome et Rhône, and almost a family member, since the sister of Weiller's wife had married his son, Henri Claudel, in 1936. In the early fall of 1940, Weiller was one of the first victims of Vichy's policies of "épuration administrative": he was deprived of his French citizenship, his properties were confiscated, and he was imprisoned for a while. Claudel immediately and repeatedly, if vainly, intervened in his favor, going all the way to Pétain. His diary from October 1940 onwards registers in very strong terms his growing contempt for the Vichy officials, the Maréchal included. (P.-L. Weiller eventually managed to escape to America in 1942.)

Although it is excessive to claim, as Mr. Tuck does, that Claudel engaged in any Resistance activity, it is worth recalling the celebrated letter he wrote on December 24, 1941 to the Grand Rabbin de France: "I wish to write to you to convey the disgust, horror, indignation felt by all good French people, especially Catholics, regarding the inequities, confiscations, and bad treatments of all kinds, which our Jewish compatriots are currently victims of." The hostility he had to suffer from Vichy officials following the publicizing of this letter is well documented in volume seven of the *Cahiers Paul Claudel*.

Vincent Giroud
Beinecke Library
Yale University
New Haven, Conn.

Jim Tuck replies:
It is far easier to measure degrees of collaboration than of resistance. Collaboration is open; resistance, for the most part, clandestine. Yet there are strong clues in the case of Paul Claudel. Mr. Giroud brands as "excessive" my claim that Claudel took part in the Resistance. Yet at the trial of Charles Maurras it was brought out that the Vichy authorities considered Claudel dangerous enough to call in the Gestapo to deal with him. Would their special expertise have been enlisted against a man whose Resistance activity was limited to writing a sympathetic letter to the Grand Rabbi of France?

Mr. Giroud states that Claudel's ode to Pétain came in the wake of Pétain dismissing Pierre Laval from his government, suggesting that Claudel may have considered this an act of "disassociation from collabortation." Such a view conflicts with those of leading Vichy historians. Robert Paxton says that "if anything, (Laval's) successors . . . came even closer to direct military collaboration (with Germany) than Laval had done." Bertram Gordon writes that "Pétain and Laval's successors made very clear by their words (and) acts that Laval's dismissal did not in any

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way imply a repudiation of collaboration with Germany." The Pétain-Laval quarrel was an internal political dispute flavored by personal antipathy, e.g., the austere Marshal's revulsion against the earthy, chain-smoking Laval blowing cigarette smoke in his face.

Mr. Giroud is correct about the date of Claudel's first poem; it was 1940, not 1942.

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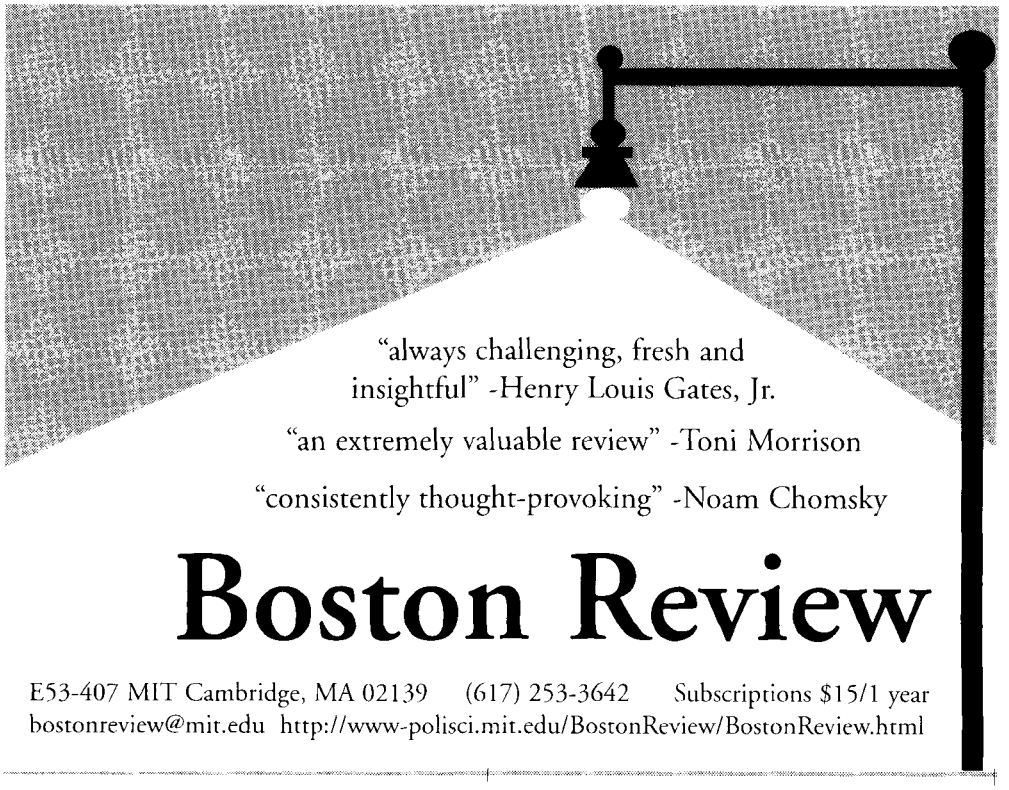

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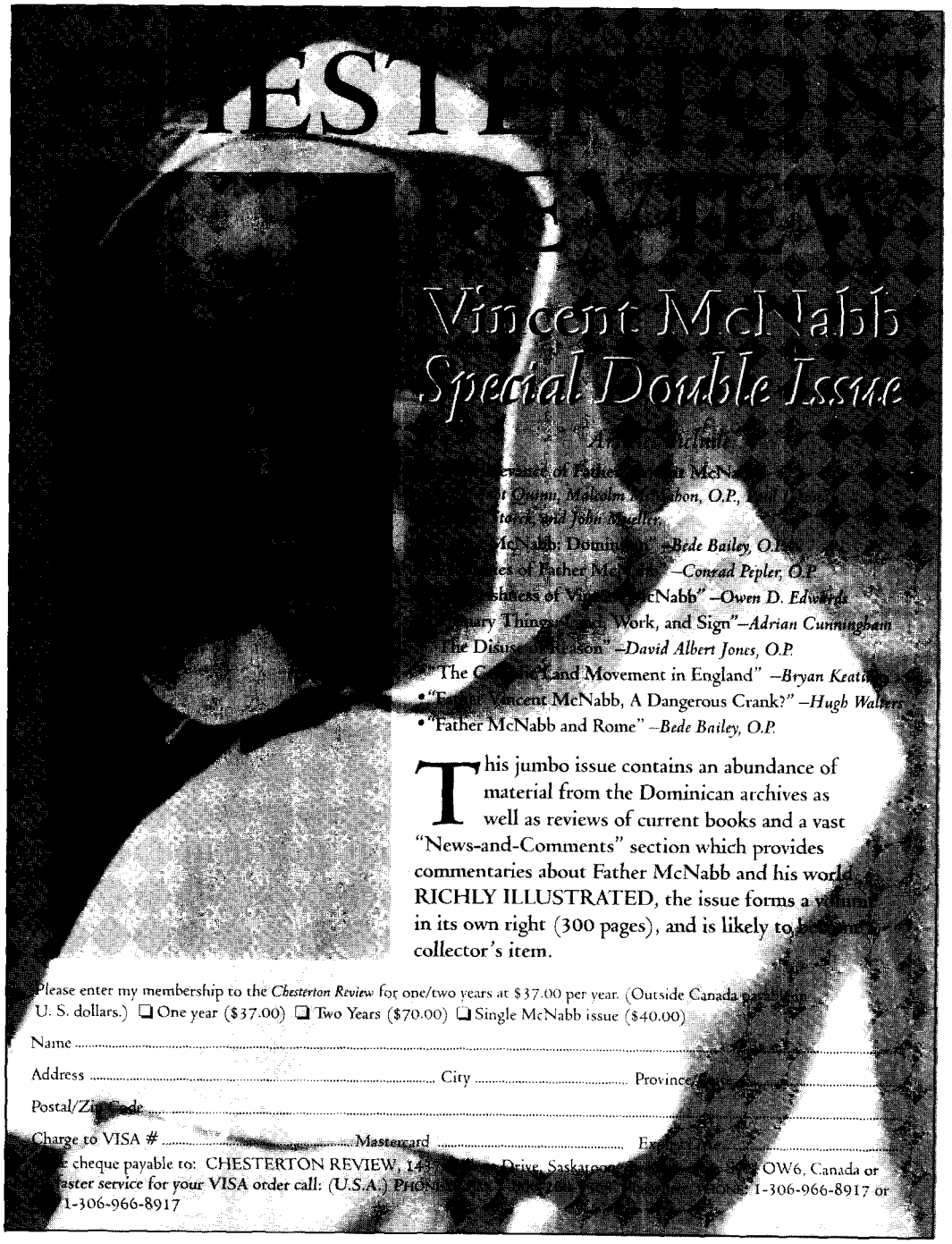

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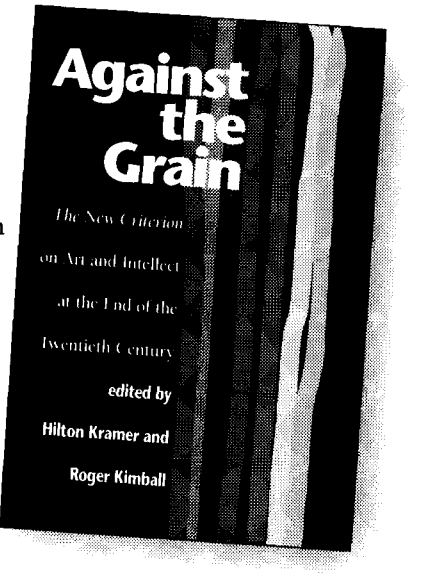

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